Restoring Ancient Mythology in Medieval Benares:
Glimpses into the Age and Meaning of the Kāśīkhaṇḍa

CONTENTS

2

Abbreviations

AgS   *Agastyasaṃhitā*
- **BARKHUIS**, Roelf, *Agastyasaṃitā 1-23: Introduction, Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, 2 Parts, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Groningen **1995**.

DBP   *Devībhāgavatāpurāṇam*
- *Devībhāgavatāpurāṇam*, Nag Publishers, Delhi **1986**.
- **VIJNANANDA**, Swami (translator), *The Sri Mad Devi Bhagavatam*, AMS, New York **1974** (Allahabad 1921-1923).

DM   *Devīmāhātmya*, All India Kashiraj Trust, Varanasi 1963

GŚ   *Gorakṣaśataka*
- in: G. W. **BRIGGS**, *Gorakhnāth and the Kānphaṭa Yogīs*, Motilal Barsidass, Delhi **1989** (1938), pp. 284-304.
- Swami **KUVALAYANANDA** & S. A. **SHUKLA** (eds), *Gorakṣanātha : Gorakṣaśataka*, Lonavla, Kavalya Dham n.d.

HYP   *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*
Haṭhayogapradīpikā of Svātmārāma with the Commentary Jyotsnā of Brahmānanda and English Translation, The Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras **1972**

HSPI

Hans **BAKKER** (ed.), *The History of Sacred Places in India as Reflected in Traditional Literature: Papers on Pilgrimage in South Asia, (Panels on the Viith World Sanskrit Conference, Kern Institute, Leiden: August 23-29, 1987)*, E.J. Brill, Leiden et al **1990**

JU   *Jābāla Upaniṣad*
in: J. L. **SHASTRI** (ed.), *Upaniṣatsaṃgrahaḥ: Containing 108 Upaniṣads*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi et al 1970, pp. 144-146.

KKh   *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*
- **KṢEMARĀJA ŚRĪKṚṣṆADĀSA** (ed.), *Śrī-Skandamahāpurāṇa*, Venkatesvara Press, Bombay **1910**.
- **TAGARE**, G.V. (translator), *Kāśī-Khanda of Skanda-Purāna*, Parts X & XI, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi **1996 & 1997**.
- **TRIPĀṬHĪ**, Karuṇapāti, *Kāśī-Khaṇḍa With Two Commentaries 'Rāmānandī' by Ācārya Śrī Rāmānanda & Hindī 'Nārāyaṇī' by Śrī Nārāyaṇapati Tripāṭhī*, Ratna Printing Books, Vārāṇasī **1991**.

MhBh   *Mahābhārata*
VAN BUITENEN, J.A.B. (translator an editor), *The Mahābhārata: 2 The Book of the Assembly Hall & 3 The Book of the Forest*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London **1975**.

SPI *Skandapurāṇa*
ADRIANSEN, Rob, BAKKER, Hans T. and ISAACSON, Harunaga, *The Skandapurāṇa: Volume I, Adhyāyas 1-25. Critically Edited with Prolegomena and English Synopsis*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen **1998**.

SPIIA *Skandapurāṇa*
BAKKER, Hans T. and ISAACSON, Harunaga, *The Skandapurāṇa: Volume IIA, Adhyāyas 26-31.14. The Vārāṇasī Cycle. Critical Edition with an Introduction, English Synopsis & Philological and Historical Commentary*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen **2004**.

TS *Tristhalīsetu*
Nārāyaṇa BHAṬṬA. *Tristhalīsetu*, Ānandāśrama-saṃskṛtagranthāvali **1916**.

TVK *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*
Rangaswami K. V. AIYANGAR, (ed.), *Kṛtyakalpataru of Bhaṭṭa Lakṣmīdhara, Vol. VIII : Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, Baroda Oriental Institute, Baroda **1942**.

VMSP *Vārāṇasīmāhātmya of Skandapurāṇa*
in: *idem* SPIIA

Introduction

The following pages would like to serve as a partial ground work for a larger research project focusing on the Hindu religious history of Vārāṇasī after the arrival of Islam. If they leave some issues open-ended it is due to the magnitude of the field, too vast to be exhaustively dealt within the present study, which offers a few conclusions I intend to verify and develop at a further stage.

The starting point for the aforementioned research is marked by the 1194 iconoclastic invasion of the holy city by Qutb al-din Aibak, a main hypothesis being that the reconfiguration of the Hindu mythology contained in the *Kāśī-khaṇḍa* (KKh) responded to this upheaval that shook without destroying the foundations of Hindu belief in holy places. Significant differences emerge when we compare the KKh with the narratives embodied in the previous Vārāṇasī *māhātmya* of the *Skanda-purāṇa* (VMSP), the *Skanda-purāṇa* being a work that was "widely accepted as authoritative in North India before the thirteenth century".[1] The KKh partly compensates for the withdrawal of this text from the limelight of the Hindu scene, restoring the Vārāṇasī mythology after Islam irreversibly settles in the holy city.

Together with interpreting the historical meaning of the innovations introduced by the KKh's mythology, it is essential to determine its date with some degree of accuracy. Or in its aim to praise the timeless glory of Vārāṇasī the KKh makes no direct reference to historic events which it buries under a thick layer of mythological allusions. Due to the text's opaqueness, its date of composition has remained a disputed matter among scholars for over a century, and the amount of speculation regarding the city's religious history is sometimes bewildering. An important portion of this history is bound to remain beyond our reach until the context and circumstances under which the KKh was produced are closely approached.

Why was this text produced and under which circumstances? What need was felt for the Vārāṇasī mythology not only to increase in volume but also to reformulate itself? These are questions that will remain in the background of the present study.

This work is divided in two parts. After a critical assessment of those arguments put forward by previous scholarship in respect of the elusive dating of the KKh (part one) I will attempt a twofold approach that will combine philological and interpretive methodologies (part two). On the one hand, a text-critical analysis to the KKh which, to my present knowledge, has never been attempted before, should serve to place our text in some sort of timeline by establishing relative chronologies with other literary sources. Secondly, we shall

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[1]   SPI, 4.

interpret the mythology by applying a hermeneutics of demythologization, aiming to decode the historic religious context from the veiled references provided by our text.

It is a given fact of hermeneutics that all interpretations rely on some kind of presupposition, but not all presuppositions are equally reliable. We must therefore reflect upon our own starting points before proceeding further, and try to date our text through text-critical analysis. This is not to say that interpretation plays no role in text-critical analysis, but dating our text without the help of this indispensable philological tool, through uncritical hermeneutics, would represent a major failure for the kind of study I am willing to undertake.

A careful study of the narrative structure of the KKh yields the outstanding relevance of *viraha bhakti* in the retelling of the Vārāṇasī mythology, an unprecedented trope in the religious literature dealing with the holy city. Focusing on the *viraha* trope has the double advantage of providing heuristic tools to speculate on the date of the text while at the same time it enables to glimpse into the particular form of *kṣetra-bhakti* that was being promoted during this time and which impact on the Hindu self-understanding was crucial. We will examine some of its forms while discussing the cognate concepts of *Kāśī-viraha*, *Kāśī-yoga* and the *Kāśī-mantra*. My hypothesis, which I shall try to corroborate, is that the KKh was written by all means after the 12th century, and that *viraha* as an outstanding form of local devotion was developed in Vārāṇasī consequently to the destruction of the major local temples, to restore a mythology that although did not acknowledge the current historical events, intended to make sense of them by speaking of loss and separation instead of destruction.

Part One:
Dating the Text

Speculations regarding the historic context of the KKh

The scholarly interest for Hindu mythology was initially prompted by a concern to unveil Indian religious history. Instead of conceiving the bulk of the purāṇic lore as a mere amass of idolatry and superstition – as many of his western contemporaries, Christian or secular, actually did -, H. H. Wilson treasured this literature as an irreplaceable source for extracting historical data. Ancient narratives were demythologized to spell out the historical truth they concealed behind the smokescreen of myth, thus laying down the standard to the following generations of Purāṇic studies. While discussing the KKh, however, Wilson's pioneering speculations were rather erratic:

> "The story of Agastya records probably, in a legendary style, the propagation of Hinduism in the south of India: and in the history of Divodāsa, king of Kāśī, we have an embellished tradition of the temporary depression of the worship of Śiva, even in its metropolis, before the ascendancy of the followers of Buddha. There is every reason to believe the greater part of the contents of the Kāśī Khaṇḍa anterior to the first attack upon Banaras by Mahmud of Ghizni."[2]

Wilson ascribes an immense antiquity to the mythology enshrined in this medieval text as if it illumined the early dissemination of Brahmanism to South India before the time of the Buddha. These speculations are no doubt wrong for now we know about an earlier layer of Vārāṇasī's mythology that clearly postdates such events. The speculative nature of Wilson's grounds were timely pointed by F. Hall in his introduction to Sherring's 1868 book on Benares, who argued that the KKh succeeded the Muslim invasions since many of the buildings mentioned in it were still in use during the 19th century (implying that if the text had been composed before the arrival of Islam, the Hindu temples named in it must have forcibly been destroyed).[3] The issue remained speculative and unsettled, allowing Eck to propose an alternative solution more than a century later:

> "[I]t seems to this writer unlikely that the literary care and attention lavished upon the many shrines of Kāśī would have arisen from the era of ruin and debilitation that followed the attack of Mahmud of Ghur's general Qutbud-din-Aibak in 1194. The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* makes *no mention of Muslim invaders or the destruction of holy si*[t]*es*. It seems plausible, therefore, that much of the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* came into existence during the brilliant era of the revivalist Hindu empire of the Gāhaḍavāla, even though its final compilation may have been later. In Lakṣmīdhara's time the work would have been in process of formulation and, thus, too new to have been included in his digest. The heyday of the Gāhaḍavāla empire, however, would have been the natural climate for the

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2   Wilson 1972, xliv-xlv.
3   Sherring 1975, xxxii-iii.

growth of such an extensive eulogy to Kāśī, even if its completed form came later."[4]

If Eck is correct in stating that the bulk of the KKh originated before 1194, during the rule of the Gāhaḍavāla, and was only 'compiled' at a later stage, the crucial events following 1194 become irrelevant for interpreting the new mythology of Vārāṇasī. But the fact that the KKh does not describe destructions of holy temples nor mentions any Muslims is no compelling evidence to assert that our text was unaware of these facts, as if though the KKh were a historic document and not the mythic account of the city it actually is.

A pioneering approach to the *purāṇic* corpus has been recently undertaken at Groningen by a research group presided by H. T. Bakker whose long term aim is to produce a critical edition of the original Skanda Purāṇa (SP), the first two volumes of which have been published during the last decade. Thanks to this scholarly effort, since 2004 we possess an invaluable source of information to approach the religious history of Vārāṇasī, a source which could not be utilized by former studies on the holy city, containing the early mythology retrieved from old manuscripts. Sceptical attitudes have been expressed as to the worth of embarking on such a philological approach to the Purāṇas,[5] but the outcome of the Groningen team has shown how rewarding such breathtaking enterprise can be, and how necessary it is to ground historical research beyond mere speculations. For the first time, Bakker's edition makes unmistakably clear that the KKh is not a constitutive part of the original SP.[6] Although Bakker concentrates on the early mythic strata and therefore does not deal in detail with the KKh, he considers the

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[4]   Eck 1993, 10, my italics.

[5]   Purāṇic studies often dismiss entangling themselves in serious philological research claiming these sources to be intractable from a text-critical perspective. Thus, in their popular text-book to the Purāṇas, Dimmit and van Buitenen (1978, 3) confidently proclaim a most untenable statement: "it is irrelevant to date the Purāṇas, for by definition they never contain novel materials; they merely repeat the stories of the old days." This bold verdict is nuanced, and somewhat contradicted, in the following words: "As they exist today, the Purāṇas are a stratified literature. Each titled work consists of material that has grown by numerous accretions in successive historical eras. Thus no Purāṇa has a single date of composition. The most that can be done is to determine a chronology of strata, and even that is a difficult task, given the encyclopaedic nature of each Purāṇa. It is as if they were libraries to which new volumes have been continuously added, not necessarily at the end of the shelf, but randomly. Thus dating these works with any accuracy must await the discrimination of the strata, a large task yet to be begun." *Ibid.*, 5.

[6]   This was a current assumption until very recently. Thus, Eck's famous study conceives the KKh not as an autonomous work but as "[o]ne of the seven *khandas*, sections, of the Skanda Purāṇa" adding that "[t]he structure of the whole Skanda Purāṇa is based on the great tīrthas of India." Eck 1983, 347. It is noteworthy that Bakker refers to this page of Eck's work as if the latter assumed with him that the KKh (not the SP) was 'composed' (rather than just 'compiled') after the 12th century. Bakker in fact misquotes Eck when he claims that she states that KKh's "final composition [*sic*] must have been after the destruction of many of the city's temples in 1194." SPI, 15. Eck's original (1983, 347) reads instead 'final compilation', as she also argues in the passage (Eck 1993, 10) quoted above in our text.

latter to be the first work of Post-Islamic Hindu mythology in Vārāṇasī. Furthermore, he places our text two centuries later than Eck, to demythologize its content in the light of contemporary events deliberately concealed in mythic language:

> "In these circumstances it is no surprise that emphasis was laid on Vārāṇasī's character as an eternal mythic city. No matter how depressing the historical situation might have been, concealed under the debris, the mosques and the Mohammedan quarter was a more fundamental divine reality. It seems that the ruin of old Vārāṇasī was just the required condition to stimulate the Hindu imagination. In response to the degrading reality of the 13th and 14th century, a timeless Vārāṇasī centring around Viśveśvara, drawn up on a grand scale, was depicted in a new text of about 12,000 verses, the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*."[7]

Bakker assumes that the creation of the KKh took place in a hostile environment where its author(s) lacked royal patronage, after the government of Vārāṇasī had fallen into the hands of Islamic power at the end of the 12th century. One of the most striking features of the text, he contends, were the adverse circumstances surrounding its composition and the lavish reaction these circumstances instilled in the Hindu imagination. Bakker describes this stubborn response as a form of "resilience", and we shall refer to his work as advocating the "resilience theory".[8] Closely connected with the production of the KKh was the contemporary rise of a new Śaivite cult centring around the Viśveśvara temple, which Bakker (1996, 42) views as the "main symbol of the Hindu response to Muslim dominance" after the destruction in 1194 of Avimukteśvara, the former great temple of the city.

Reacting to the above theory, a controversial thesis has recently been put forward by T. Smith, challenging the "prevailing historical narrative that sustains explaining the transition from Avimukteśvara to Viśveśvara" as an effect of the Islamic revolution.[9] Instead, Smith thinks that the KKh emerged together with a Viśveśvara temple that was prominent before the arrival of Qutb-al-dīn Aibak, even prior to the Gāhaḍavāla rule. Smith provides no compelling evidence for dating the KKh, but speculates over the patronizing networks of the medieval Hindu dynasties to discard the scholarly "narrative" which ascribes the KKh to a date consequent to the Islamic invasion of 1194. He thus assigns the authorship of the KKh to members of the Mattamayūra branch of Śaivasiddhānta, a sect that

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[7]   Bakker 1996, 43.

[8]   It is significant that the "resilience theory" espoused by Bakker in respect of Vārāṇasī is also applicable to the history of other Hindu holy cities. Thus, it is claimed that most of the available *māhātmya* material relating to Mathurā was composed after the arrival of Islam, before the advent of the Mughal era: "Some time in the thirteenth, fourteenth, or fifteenth century there were local brahmins who, although they could not arrange for the construction of shrines and temples, could at least be inventive with the textual tradition, perform rituals, and make the best of whatever vestiges remained from the period prior to the Muslim conquest." Entwistle HSPI, 21.

[9]   See T. Smith 2007, 246-ff.

was patronized by the Kalacuri dynasty during the 11[10] century.[10] The KKh would have been created during this time, to kindle the incipient cult of Viśveśvara and encourage the construction of a new imperial temple, the "Karṇameru" of Karṇadeva (1041-1075), allegedly the original shrine of Viśveśvara.

The telling fact that the 12th century *nibandha* author Lakṣmīdhara does not provide any testimonia for the KKh in his extensive dealings with the Vārāṇasī mythology remains to be explained by those who argue that the KKh precedes 1194. If the KKh belonged to the end of the 11th century, as Smith claims, it is quite impossible that it could have escaped the notice of a Lakṣmīdhara. As we have seen above, Eck believes Lakṣmīdhara does not quote from it because the text was still being composed during his time and had not yet reached its final form. But Eck's explanation does not endorse Smith's claim. Smith (2007, 267) argues that Lakṣmīdhara was acquainted with our text, but decided to omit it from his encyclopaedic work since he was hired by the Gāhaḍavāla ruler Govindacandra, whose dynasty rivalled the Kalacuri kings that had earlier sponsored the construction of the Viśveśvara/Karṇameru temple and the composition of KKh. Smith arguments on this respect are not very compelling.[11] Be that as it may, the fact that Ballālasena, a later king of Bengal writing in the second half of the 12th century, also provides no testimony for the KKh while mentioning other recent *khaṇḍas* of SP, is overlooked by Smith.[12]

While it is true that the historiography of Hinduism has become highly politicized during the last decades, with some Indian scholars writing dramatized accounts about Hindu temples massively destroyed by Muslim iconoclasm,[13]

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[10]   Apart from some general observations regarding the inclusivistic strategies used by the Mantramārga in its effort to adapt itself to new religious contexts (a strategy that applies to the Śaivasiddhānta as a whole and not necessarily to the Mattamayūra), Smith provides no evidence for his claim. See Smith 2007, 278. Smith's adscription of the KKh to this branch of Śaivasiddhānta is not based on any analysis of the KKh's particular mythology or theological contents. Smith's assumption might deserve further exploration, but there is hardly any evidence to prove it since, as Prof. D. Goodall has kindly pointed to me, "what we know about the people of that branch [Mattamayūra] is gleaned from a handful of inscriptions whose purpose is not to sketch doctrinal tenets." (email reply 08/16/2007).

[11]   Smith interprets a grant from the Gāhadavāla period (1120) where king Govindacandra confiscates a number of villages in Vārāṇasī from a certain Rudraśiva "who is identified as a minister of the Kalacuris" as if it alluded to the former Śaiva Siddhāntin minister of Yaśaḥkarṇa. Smith connects this Rudraśiva with the homonymous Śaiva Siddhāntin master who appears in a later Nepalese inscription from 1143. See Smith 2007, 249-251. Smith (2007, 273) provides this as evidence to the rivalry not only between Kalacuris and Gāhadavālas but between the latter and the Mattamayūri sect, questioning the tolerant religious policy of the Gāhadavāla house who in spite of patronizing different sectarian movements withdrew their royal sponsorship from the Mattamayūra school of Śaiva Siddhānta. On this basis he explains Lakṣmīdhara's bias to omit any reference to the KKh in his *opus magnum*.

[12]   For Ballālasena see SPI, 8-9.

[13]   See for instance Sita Ram Goel's, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them*, Voice of India, New Delhi 1990. Eaton criticizes the biased "iconoclasm thesis" that underlies the former work in the following way: "By relying strictly on evidence found in contemporary or near-contemporary epigraphic and literary evidence spanning a period of more than five centuries

Smith seems exceedingly reluctant to take this evidence seriously when he downplays Muslim "incursions" as "that persistent bugbear of Indological studies",[14] minimizing the importance of the Islamic presence in Vārāṇasī as a valid framework for interpreting some major changes in the religious history of the city.[15] Smith dismisses the important work of K. Sukul (*Vārāṇasī Vaibhava* 1974, 278-360) when this author interprets a number of passages in which the KKh firmly advocates temple reconstruction, as being motivated by an earlier wave of destruction:

> " It was Sukul who first realized that the KKh's accounts of the shrines of Vārāṇasī frequently mentioned multiple locations for various shrines, concluding that this shows that the KKh was composed over a period spanning both before and after the presumably landmark 1194 attack, which is thought to have radically reconfigured the sacred landscape of the city. The present analysis has shown, however, that the KKh is not simply reporting the existence of new shrines, but is actively sponsoring the construction of new temples and the repair of old ones. Despite Sukul's assertion, *there are no references in the text to any temples having been destroyed or dismantled, only there being dilapidated (jīrṇa) or crumbling with time (kālena bhaṅga).* There seem to be, moreover, particular shrines which the text is particularly interested in garnering support for – Viśveśvara, most prominently, but also Vṛddhakāleśvara and Dhruveśa, among others. The māhātmyas for each of these temple complexes occur at crucial moments in the text – coming at the conclusion of extended narratives – and they are all given an inordinate amount of attention. Viewing the KKh as actively sponsoring temple construction, moreover, is in keeping with the general understanding of texts as being active participants in their historical moments of emergence, rather than unfairly expecting them to be straightforward accounts of 'real history.'"[16]

It is rather surprising that Smith rules out Sukul's interpretations on the ground that the text is not explicit about destructions, a rather naive approach to the mythic language of our source which is likely to be euphemistic whenever its claims about the eternity and indestructibility of the temples are threatened. For we must assume that if the KKh was written after 1194, its author(s) was wise enough not to undermine his own mythological claims by confessing the historic vicissitudes the holy city had shamefully endured. In this respect, Smith sees no need for demythologizing his sources and prefers to interpret them at face value. He thereby falls pray to their mythological spell, failing to recognize a well

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(1192-1729), one may identify eighty instances of temple desecration whose historicity appears reasonably certain. Although this figure falls well short of the 60,000 claimed by some Hindu nationalists [...]" Eaton 2000, 296-7.

[14]   See Smith 2007, 305.

[15]   Thus, criticizing Bakker's views, he writes: "But this image of the Gāhaḍavālas as being the last great 'Hindu' dynasty who could not, ultimately, protect the culture of northern India from the Muslim hordes, has undoubtedly been overdetermined in assessments of Vārāṇasī history, and in the dating of the KKh itself." Smith 2007, 266.

[16]   Smith 2007, 198-199, my italics.

known strategy of this particular genre, namely, the deliberate concealment of those prosaic incidents that could falsify the mythic image of the holy city.[17]

A major drawback within Smith's study is that it does not rely on any sort of text critical analysis to attempt dating the KKh. Smith excuses himself on the grounds "of there being no systematic text-critical analysis of the KKh manuscript tradition to date".[18] Instead, his criterion consists in "tracing patterns of patronage of particular Śaiva sectarian formations through the text",[19] a most risked venture considering the text's condition as well as its inherent opacity to refer to its historical context. And yet, Smith's awareness of the meagre textual situation does not prevent him from expressing some definitive conclusions:

> "The analysis of the literary structure of the KKh thus far leads us to a few conclusions. First, the overall coherence of the literary scheme of the KKh, along with its apparent textual unity (pending on more comprehensive critical study of its manuscript history), gives the impression that the composition of the overall structure of this text was not spread out over a period of centuries [Eck], but may in fact be the result of a single author, or group of authors working in

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[17]   Smith avoids demythologization because he emphasises the prescriptive rather than the descriptive character of the sources. He thinks that instead of concealing historical data the texts project an ideal situation that does not reflect the earlier reality. Discussing the VMSP, he states: "Whereas Bakker and Motichandra assume that the early Purāṇic accounts of Vārāṇasī present a Vārāṇasī in which the diverse elements of cultural practices had already been somehow 'blended' or assimilated by the brāhmaṇical tradition, I suggest rather that the texts themselves are active attempts to incorporate these divergent practices. The strategies the authors employ cannot be looked at as concretized representations of an historical situation, with incidental accretions of myth. Instead the myths are themselves frequently dramatic hermeneutic strategies in which real social groups are included or excluded, represented and transformed." Smith 2007, 46. Further on he disagrees with Bakker's interpretation of VMSP on similar terms: "The approach to the text and its historical context that I will take, however, differs from that of Bakker. In some ways it will considerably extend his conclusions, and in others question them. In short, the present study aims to read the text, understanding it as a complex and dialogic contribution to the world that its authors were participating in. This allows for a more sensitive and even accurate understanding of the text, rather than seeing it as imperfectly preserving elusive kernels of historical fact, almost impossibly obscured by the accretions of mythological embellishment."*Ibid.*, 58.

[18]   "For a Purāṇic composition, the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (KKh) is a text which is extraordinarily polished and carefully constructed. It seems to have always consisted of exactly 100 *adhyāyas* and, unlike many Purāṇic texts, it does not seem to have developed regional recensions or major variations in its form, and it seems to be largely the work of a single composer or group of composers. It must be conceded, however, that this judgement is provisional and impressionistic, based on my own rather casual survey of ten or so manuscripts found in various libraries of India, comparing them to the printed edition of the text published by Sampūrṇānanda from Vārāṇasī. A critical edition of this text is surely a desideratum; this would provide information about the production and transmission of the text that would be crucial for the present project, which aims to relate the literary strategies of the text to the historical contours of Vārāṇasī. Unfortunately, to attempt a comprehensive critical edition of this text is an undertaking well beyond the scope of the present study. An extraordinary popular text, the KKh exists in hundreds of manuscripts in scripts as diverse as Śāradā, Devanāgarī, Grantha, and Telugu, in libraries and private collections scattered throughout the subcontinent and beyond." Smith 2007, 150.

[19]   Smith 2007, 232.

close conjunction. At the very least, it must be acknowledged that there is a very clear and consistent organization to this very large text, and this itself is quite a feat. Regardless of what further critical study will reveal about the history of the constitution of the text, the KKh as we have it is clearly crafted with a number of specific purposes in mind."[20]

On the other hand, Smith praises the text's literary merits[21] to ground some fundamental points that buttress his theory. After analyzing the "language" of the KKh Smith (2007, 151-156) asserts its bias for brahminical orthodoxy following some chapters of legalistic import that express themselves in prescriptive Dharmaśāstric style. He then argues that KKh's poetic quality reveals its courtly origin: "the many Kāvya conventions that the KKh so consciously employs would seem to suggest a courtly milieu for this text."[22] However, the kind of pun (śabdaśleśa) Smith enthusiastically praises for its poetic qualities is not the most sophisticated sample of kāvya a demanding rāsika is likely to delight in. Probably nobody in the courtly audience of Karṇadeva would have relished such verses after enjoying the works of a Bilhana or a Vidyapati, exceptional poets who were patronized by the aforementioned king. More than a literary achievement, the KKh seems a conscious attempt to imitate a more sophisticated poetic genre, and in this respect, Smith's arguments are not very binding, since with the resilience theory in mind, we can also argue that the text might have been written by Brahmins deprived of courtly support willing to assert their moral and aesthetic ideals in a politically hostile milieu.

Smith is right when he writes that the textual situation of the KKh presents a number of difficulties, but such predicament is no excuse to prevent us from undertaking a text critical analysis with the materials that are presently available in the form of published editions. In this respect, further research into the commentarial tradition of this text should be undertaken, since I suspect the KKh is likely to have attained its present 'canonical' form with the *Rāmānandī vyākhyayā*, a late commentary which seems to have laid the standard for the 'definitive' edition of KKh, as far as we can see not only from Tripāṭhī's commented edition but also from the available versions of the Venkatesa Press

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[20]   Smith 2007, 226-7.
[21]   "the KKh stands out prominently among sthala-māhātmyas of the entire Purāṇic corpus that focus on any place. I am not aware of any premodern Purāṇic māhātmya that comes close to the KKh in terms of [...] its linguistic sophistication and narrative flourish. It may not be an exaggeration to say that this work is the very epitome of the sthala-māhātmya. Even at the risk of being repetitive, I will make frequent mention of the remarkably literary cohesiveness and totalizing vision of the KKh [...] Belying the common understanding of the māhātmya genre as being redundant, repetitive and cliched, this text is both creatively innovative and extraordinarily ambitious and specific in its aims." Smith 2007, 141.
[22]   Smith 2007, 158.

and Tagare's English translation, both of which are clearly influenced by the commentary.[23]

As mentioned in the introduction, in the following pages I shall attempt a text-critical analysis based on the comparison of different textual sources in order to approach a relative chronology that has not been attempted before with respect to the KKh. Following the resilience theory sketched by Bakker (the heuristic value of which is too easily dismissed as a "scholarly narrative") I shall disagree with Smith's assumptions to argue that the composition of the KKh was not connected with the initial construction of a Viśveśvara shrine sponsored by a royal patron. Instead, our text is most likely to have been composed sometime between the 13th and 14th centuries, shortly after the aforesaid temple had been destroyed by Islamic iconoclasm. I shall try to prove that the KKh represents a reconfiguration of the Vārāṇasī mythology that needed urgently to reformulate itself in the midst of unprecedented adversity, after its major icons had been ruined. Thus, the KKh reveals itself as the outstanding literary expression of a resilient effort to revive a cult that has been stricken at its very heart, a utopian response aiming to restore the shattered ideal of a mythic holy city.

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[23] The date of this commentary remains to be established. T. Smith (2007, 237) speaks of the 'seventeenth century commentator Rāmānanda' but unfortunately provides no clue as to the criteria for dating him in that point of time. See also *ibid.*, 172 footnote 324.

Part Two:
Analysis and Interpretation

Asceticism and Bhakti in Vārāṇasī: from the VMSP to the KKh

The late mythology of Vārāṇasī witnessed the impact of a new type of devotion that was gaining momentum in North India some time by the turn of the millennium. It is intriguing that this unprecedented feature surfaced all of a sudden in the religious literature of Vārāṇasī, for it was not even mentioned in the earlier sources. While every *māhātmya*, in its effort to attract pilgrims, will spare no means to celebrate the blessings that spring from particular sacred places, none seems to highlight so fervently the emotional connection with the holy city as does the KKh. In order to understand how this transition came about we need to consider the previous history and mythology of the city.

In India, an unintended consequence of the first urban formations (long after the Indus Valley Civilization had disappeared) seems to have been the rise of a new 'soteriology' that stressed individual salvation (*mokṣa/nirvāṇa*) beyond this world, opposing the popular sort of 'communal religion' where worldly aims are legitimately pursued. This phenomenon crystallized in the renouncer traditions of Indian asceticism which conceived secular city-life a major obstacle for liberation.[24] Long before becoming a Hindu holy city Vārāṇasī sheltered different types of ascetics (the Buddha and Mahāvīra being two major examples) who preached their religious views in the worldly climate of an urban commercial centre. The city must have looked radically different then than how it looked a thousand years later, when the theistic strands of Hinduism were erecting their temples in it. The ascetic legacy however did not vanish, and Bakker states that during this time Vārāṇasī witnessed the coexistence of two different religious strands: the ascetic and the devotional.

> "The holiness of most of the places described in the SP is based on their connection with ascetic achievements, the merit of which achievements they in turn bestow upon their visitors. They have little to do with ordinary devotional practices such as *snāna, dāna,* and *pūjā.* Evidently Vārāṇasī's sacred space had already by the 7th century differentiated into two mutual permeating but nevertheless contrasting religious spheres, one devotional, catering for emotional needs, for the benefit of those pursuing happiness and religious merit, the other geared to the transmundane aims of ascetics and the moribund. It is probably this unique interlacement that made Vārāṇasī into the holiest city of the land." [25]

Quoting the above passage T. Smith (2007, 45) criticises Bakker for his vagueness arguing that "readers are left to speculate as to who were the actors involved, what precise relationship between the two modes of worship were, and by what processes they became 'merged' in the Purāṇic tradition." Bakker could have certainly been less concise in this respect, even if he notes that during the early phase of holy Vārāṇasī the ascetic ethos was more strongly emphasised in

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24   See Gombrich 2001, 55.
25   H. T. Bakker 1996, 36-37.

the Śaivite texts, while material evidence would indicate the contemporary presence of an important devotional strand linked to Viṣnuism.[26]

Before illustrating how the historical development of these "two mutual permeating but nevertheless contrasting religious spheres" is represented in the KKh, I would like to delve for a moment into the meaning of the terms "asceticism" and "devotion" in the present context.

In his homonymous book J. Bronkhorst describes in a nutshell the basic presuppositions that underlie the "two sources of Indian asceticism":

> "[T]hese forms of asceticism aim at the elimination of all actions. They do so, grosso modo, in two ways. One of these is to literally abstain from all, or most, activity. This leads to a number of ascetic practices which share the common theme of motionlessness of body and mind. The other way centres around the insight that the body – and the mind – do not constitute the true self. This second way encouraged the development of different 'philosophies', which specified how body and self are related to each other; all these philosophies share the belief that the self does not participate in any action."[27]

Despite some common features such as the deprivation of sense enjoyment as a means to avoid worldly attachment, Bronkhorst distinguishes between Vedic and non-Vedic forms of Indian asceticism, arguing that Non-Vedic asceticism was originally grounded on a worldview that presumed karma, aimed at liberation from rebirth (*mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*) through knowledge of a spiritual self, and entailed world renouncement (*parivrāja*) laying stress on celibacy and a monastic lifestyle. The less radical Vedic asceticism (*vānaprastha*) did not dismiss the householder stage of life essential to the performance of sacrifices and the preservation of the ancestor world.[28]

Bronkhorst (1998, 62) explains that both forms of asceticism were merged with the triumph of the Vedānta system of philosophy, which represented a sort of compromise. This was made possible only after the non-Vedic variant of asceticism, which infiltrated the Upaniṣads, described liberation (*mokṣa*) as an insight (*jñāna*) of the true inner self now acknowledged to be identical with the Vedic Brahman: "this supreme identification Brahman = self constituted an almost natural inlet for the non-Vedic ideas into orthodox Vedism."[29]

The merging of these two ascetic traditions in mainstream philosophical Vedānta was not always smooth, as we can see in Śaṅkara's authoritative commentary to *Bṛhadāraṇka Upaniṣad* 1.4.7, where it is stated that *mokṣa* can only be attained by *ātma-jñāna* and never by the merely ecstatic *cittavṛttinirodha* of yoga.[30] In any case, both these currents came to underlie the ethos of what F.

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26   See H. T. Bakker 1998, 13-14 & 19-20.
27   Bronkhorst 1998, 8.
28   See *ibid.*, 45-53.
29   *Ibid.*, 58.
30   See Bouy 1994, 51. The definition of Yoga as the cessation of mental activity occurs in Patañjali's *Yoga sūtra* 1.2.

Hardy describes as the "normative ideology of Brahmanism" where Vedāntic philosophy was predominant, and where the ascetic ideal of perfection characterized by motionlessness and the search for a self that was to be sought beyond this world and the body, led to the systematic cultivation of certain moods that grew weary of human emotions.

> "The very premises of Vedānta entail a negative attitude towards the whole empirical personality. Subject as it appears to the three limitations of time, space and matter, in view of the experience styled *Brahman* or *nirvāṇa*, it can only be regarded as *duḥkha*, existential suffering or contingent existence, to use the Buddha's expression. Logically, therefore, the spiritual exercises of *yoga*, *dhyāna* [...] aim at destroying these limitations. [...] Furthermore, when a detailed conception of the structure of the human personality has been developed, all factors which are considered not to participate in the state of liberation are relegated to the realm of *saṃsāra*; this includes the 'mind' (*buddhi, manas, citta, vijñāna*, etc.) and the 'ego' (as the principle of individuation, or in the strictly monistic schools, as the ultimate centre of object-awareness). It follows from this that emotions, placed below the 'mind' and the 'ego' and in fact directly involved via the sense-impressions with matter (this is most clearly expressed in the notion *sparśa*, contact), which is considered the basest of all phenomena of *saṃsāra* and the root of evil, were automatically suspect. Any spiritual exercise must start by suppressing them. Nor could the objects to which they relate, such as natural beauty, artistic creation, or the attraction of the female form, be accepted in any positive sense."[31]

According to Hardy, the theistic currents of Hinduism incorporated this Brahmincal ideology from a very early stage. Framed by this orthodox background of philosophical asceticism, these devotional currents asserted themselves in terms of an "intellectual" sort of *bhakti*, where meditation and *jñāna* superseded the undervalued emotional drives of the devotee. Hardy discusses these developments in the context of Viṣnuism/Kṛṣṇaism, but similar observations seem applicable to the type of religion propounded in the early Śivaite mythology of Vārāṇasī.[32] Thus, the importance of yoga and the need for rising beyond the *guṇas* is mentioned in VMSP 27.38-40 as the only means for attaining *darśan* of God. And an insight, more philosophical, type of asceticism is also mentioned when meditation (*dhyāna*) is preferred to *tapas* in VMSP 27. 41.[33] Although the devotional elements are not entirely absent,[34] asceticism (*dhyāna* or *tapas*) is clearly predominant throughout the text.

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[31]   Hardy 1983, 16.

[32]   The links between the Pāśupata ascetics who authored the VMSP and the normative ideology of Brahmanism would seem to deserve further study.

[33]   However, commenting on this passage Bakker argues that "the ineffectiveness of *tapas* alone to bring about a vision of God is certainly not consistent with the text as whole [...]".SPIIA, 201. There is a laconic reference to ṣaḍaṅgayoga in VMSP 27.46. See SPIIA, 202

[34]   Thus: karma is ultimately destroyed by God's grace only – VMSP 27.43 – and knowledge (*jñāna*) is described in terms of remembrance of God – VMSP 27.44-45.

In the Kṛṣṇaite context of South India, this intellectual form of *bhakti* was countered by an emotional kind of devotion that overtook the earlier Viṣṇu mythology and transformed it into a new universe filled with human passions of love and eroticism. Hardy has shown how this was done through the religious poetry of the Alvars and we shall not deal with this at present, but he argues that a major consequence of this transformation was the creation of a new religious image of the empirical person that contradicted the basic anthropology of Vedānta. This was so because a new type of devotion (*viraha bhakti*) asserted itself through forms of worship that involved the empirical totality of the human person (body, senses and emotions; devotional actions such as singing and addressing God as a masculine lover by identifying oneself with the emotions of a *gopī*; *pūjā* and pilgrimage motivated by *viraha*, etc.) and where the love of God was raised as a higher ideal than *mokṣa*.

This kind of "emotional bhakti" was in fact lacking in the VMSP, but surfaces for the first time in the Vārāṇasī mythology with the KKh. The eroticism of the KKh is no doubt an outstanding feature in this respect, an aspect that surfaces in manifold ways, on one occasion even in connection with Kṛṣṇa and his "dripping" queens.[35] This is not to say that the author of the KKh deliberately rejected the ascetic values of the Brahmanical ideology, but in stressing emotional bhakti, eroticism was frequently invoked and some ascetic ideals reformulated.[36] Bhakti and asceticism coexist rather peacefully in the KKh, but whenever they appear to clash it is always the former that prevails. This is evident from the longest and most important narrative contained in our text, the retelling of the legend of the unimpeachable king Divodāsa, whose outstanding ascetic merits entitled him to receive a boon from Brahmā whereby he became the only ruler of Vārāṇasī after forcing the gods, including Śiva, out of the holy city. Exiled in the Mandara mountain, Śiva will reveal himself as the highest devotee of Kāśī, tirelessly craving for her presence while enduring the unbearable pangs of *viraha*. In an attempt to retrieve his forlorn love, the God will try several strategies to make Divodāsa fall from his high ascetic state, sending disguised emissaries into the city, but never with success because once these emissaries arrive their attempts at luring Divodāsa invariably fail; besides, they are so extremely charmed by the city that they do not even care to return to the Mandara mountain and report Śiva about their failures. In the end, Viṣṇu points out to Divodāsa that in spite of his great merits he has incurred in one major flaw, which is not to have bereft the city from its God, but to have deprived Śiva of his favourite lover. Divodāsa realizes his fault, and Śiva returns in glory to meet the city again. Śiva's devotion for Kāśī overpowers Divodāsa's ascetic hubris. The Śiva we find in the

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[35]   See KKh 48.

[36]   Thus control of the bodily senses is praised as a virtue but it is said to be achieved through devotion and not through yoga. See KKh 81.74. In order to avoid misconceptions, it must be said that in spite of the relevance of eroticism the sexual ethos of the KKh is very conservative, with chastity being frequently praised as a saintly virtue in the case of the wild beasts inhabiting the city (KKh 3.68-70) and of exemplary women like Lopāmudrā (4.6-106) and Suśīlā (33.73-76).

KKh is thus much more erratic and vulnerable than the infallible one we encounter in the VMSP. This vulnerability is telling inasmuch as it conveys a theology that, instead of conceiving Śiva as an unruffled ascetic who is always in control, portrays the highest God as subject to the deepest human passions of love.[37]

To give another example of this radical change in favour of a devotional religious ethos we may again contrast a narrative that is common to both the VMSP and the KKh. In the VMSP the ascetic strand is well represented in the story dealing with Harikeśa's conversion (30.7-12), an inferior type of demon disowned by his father after expressing his intention to overcome his lower nature as a *yakṣa* and become Śiva's devotee. Expelled from home, Harikeśa sets out to Vārāṇasī, where he spends a long time enduring ascetic practices and is finally rewarded Śiva's grace to become a powerful *gaṇa* in charge of protecting the holy city (*kṣetrapāla*). Harikeśa's conversion promotes him to a higher rank of being and is motivated by an ascetic model of perfection that is condemnatory of his crooked nature.[38]

When we turn to the "updated" story of Harikeśa's conversion in KKh 32 and read about his childhood life, we are immediately reminded of another great child devotee who in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (BhP) embodies one of the main paradigms of emotional bhakti for Viṣṇu:

> Unattached even as he plays with sand, he creates a liṅga made of dust and worships it full of hopes with fresh green grass. He calls on every friend by Shiva's name: Hey Candraśekhara! Hey Bhūteśa! Hey Mṛtyuñjaya! Hey Mṛḍa! Hey Iśvara! Hey Dhūrjaṭi! O Khaṇḍaparaśu! O Mṛḍṛnīśa! O Trilocana! O Bharga! O Śambhu! O Paśupati! O Pinākin! O Ugra! O Śaṅkara! [...] He thus repeatedly summons his partners with intense longing, his ears hearing no name apart from Hara's. With his feet he resorts nowhere except towards the courtyard of Bhuteśvara, to behold no beauty other than his [Hara's] while his eyes stroll around. His tongue relishes only the nectar that is the syllables composing Hara's name, his nose sensing nothing but the fragrant water flowing from Śiva's lotus feet. His hands are intent on doing what is pleasing to Śiva and his mind thinks of nothing else. Pure in heart, he drinks the beverages that have been blessed by Śiva; eats each morsel of food only if it has been previously enjoyed by [viz. consecrated to] the Three-eyed Lord; sees Śiva alone as omnipresent in any situation. While walking, singing, sleeping, standing, resting, eating or drinking, he sees none else than the Three-eyed Lord visible all

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[37]   Śiva confesses to be completely helpless in his attraction for the city, stating that: "*nirmamaṃ cāpi nirmohaṃ yā mām api vimohayet / kair na saṃsmaraṇī yā sā kāśī viśvavimohinī // nāmāpi madhuraṃ yasyāḥ parānanda prakāśakam / kāśyāḥ kāśīti kāśīti sā kaiḥ puṇyair na japyet //* KKh 55.50-51. More on this Kāśī mantra will be said below.

[38]   "The purport of the story seems to be that going to Vārāṇasī and practicing asceticism may help in attaining a higher birth, no matter the state of life one is presently in. Throughout the Māhātmya Vārāṇasī is hailed as a place where beings of all walks of life may reach perfection." H. T. Bakker, 2004, 6

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around. And as he sleeps, he wakes up at night suddenly crying "Where are you leaving, O Three-eyed, wait for a while". [39]

If instead of Śiva the above text would have mentioned Viṣṇu epithets, the normal guess would be that the boy (bālaka) this text is referring to is Prahlāda. For both Prahlāda and Harikeśa relate to their gods not through the rigours of asceticism but through intense emotions of love. Can we think of an influence of the BhP over the KKh in this respect? [40]

While dealing with Harikeśa, the VMSP does not describe him as the ideal bhakta of Śiva. It is only in the KKh where we are told that the totality of Harikeśa's sense functions are absorbed in the worship of his beloved deity (ears, feet, eyes, nose, hands, tongue, etc.) to the point of being completely blind to anything else. This is not the "blindness" a yogi achieves when he shuns the stimuli from the outer world withdrawing in pratyāhāra. Harikeśa at least is not endeavouring to cancel out his sense impressions but instead beholds them as occasions for meeting Śiva in the midst of his worldly experience, while enjoying positive sense contact. But simultaneously, there is a sense of absence that underlies the experience of God's pervasiveness, for during sleep, Harikeśa constantly opens his eyes longing to see Śiva, whom he calls out as soon as he realizes he is not physically there (v. 61). This is the only instance in the whole text where this particular kind of religious mood is termed "bhakti-yoga" (KKh

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[39]
    pāṃsukrīḍnasakto 'pi kuryāl liṅgaṃ rajomayam /
    śādvalaiḥ komalatṛṇaiḥ pūjayec ca sakautukam //
    ākārayati mitrāṇi śivanāmnā 'khilāni saḥ /
    candraśekhara bhūteśa mṛtyuñjaya mṛdeśvara //
    dhūrjaṭe khaṇḍaparaśo mṛdānīśa trilocana /
    bharga śambho paśupate pinākinnugra śaṅkara //
    ...
    savayaskān iti muhuḥ samāhūyati lālayan /
    śabdagrahau na gṛhṇītas tasyānyākhyāṃ harād ṛte //
    padbhyāṃ na padyate cānyad ṛte bhūteśvarājirāt /
    draṣṭum rūpāntaraṃ tasya vīkṣaṇena vicakṣaṇe //
    rasayet tasya rasanā haranāmākṣarā 'mṛtam /
    śivāṅghrikamalāmodād ghrāṇaṃ naiva jighṛkṣati //
    karau tatkautukakarau mano manati nāparam /
    śivasātkṛtyapeyāni pīyante tena saddhiyā //
    bhakṣyante sarvabhakṣyāṇi tryakṣapratyakṣagāny api /
    sarvāvasthāsu sarvatra na sa paśyec chivaṃ vinā //
    gacchan gāyan svapaṃs tiṣṭhañ chyāno 'dan pibann api /
    paritas tryakṣam aikṣiṣṭa nānyaṃ bhāvaṃ ciketi saḥ //
    kṣaṇadāsu prasupto 'pi kva yāsīti vadan muhuḥ /
    kṣaṇaṃ tryakṣa pratīkṣasva buddhyatīti sa bālakaḥ //
    KKh 32, 50-52 and 55-61.
[40]   Compare with BhP 7.4.37-41.

32.69ab), a particular form of devotion that only an extraordinary bhakta can relish.[41] (More on this later).

Although the KKh follows the standard plot set out by the VMSP while dealing with the Harikeśa story and concludes similarly with the *yakṣa* transforming into the *gaṇa* Daṇḍapāṇi, its breadth is considerably larger (180 verses compared to the concise 14 of VMSP 31) since it introduces a wealth of detail revealing the earlier ascetic strata of a narrative that is in process of being converted into a somewhat more devotional account. [42] A stark contrast stands out therefore between Harikeśa the ascetic (VMSP) and Harikeśa the bhakta (KKh), a contrast that reflects a major turn in the religious ethos of Vārāṇasī increasingly leaning towards a devotional form of worship.[43] The devotee connects with his God not by subduing his 'lower' sense-bound nature through asceticism, but through the intensity of his loving emotions.

Retelling of the Agastya-Vindhya episode in DBP and KKh

A salient feature of the KKh with respect to the earlier Vārāṇasī mythology is the incorporation of a new frame story. The content of this frame story deals with the famous episode known as the "lowering of the Vindhya Mountain", a heroic task performed by the holy sage Agastya. Compelled by his duty towards the *devas*, Agastya travels South to bring down the pride of a mountain that has swollen to belittle the Meru and in his rise has blocked the curse of sun. Even from this raised position Vindhya is able to notice the dreaded sage approaching and feels ashamed to protrude his path. Lowering to pay his respects at Agastya's feet, the sage orders the mountain to remain flat until his return from the South.

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[41]   Towards the end of the Harikeśa narrative of KKh (32.138-149) the ascetic element re-emerges when he is depicted sitting in meditation with his body emaciated through austerities. But even in this passage the *bhakti* element of Harikeśa is not at all obliterated, as seen particularly in verses 143 and 148-149.

[42]   A careful reading of KKh 32.134-136 would notice how the text is subordinating the ascetic strand (represented by Gaurī) to the devotional (embodied in Kāśī) in the implicit preference Śiva shows for Kāśī, depicted in anthropomorphic imagery as a charming lady in KKh 32.102-108. Compare also verses 138-9 with 143.

[43]   Similar instances of this type of emotional service involving the pious dedication of the sense functions during worship can be found in KKh 74.77-ff and 76.133. This crucial feature escapes the notice of T. Smith (2007, 200-205) while comparing the Harikeśa narrative in VMSP and KKh. Smith is unaware of the clash between an ascetic and a devotional strand, concluding that "[w]hereas the *Skandapurāṇa* version of this story revealed a process of incorporating the markedly marginal elements of social praxis into a newly configured brāhmaṇical model, the KKh in fact merely reinforces the familiar brāhmaṇical ideals." Smith 2007, 204. This is not exactly the case if we agree with Hardy in considering viraha-bhakti as an alternative to the ascetic ethos that underlies normative Brahminical values.

From this humbled position Vindhya will not lift since Agastya will never return from his southern excursion, allowing the sun to continue his daily course.

The earliest literary version of this story is found in the *Mahābhārata* (MhBh 3.102.2-13), but it is also recapitulated in purānic sources, of which SkPur 60.10-13 is one. It is however in the KKh that the episode becomes particularly relevant for Vārāṇasī, for it places Agastya's hermitage within the city.[44] As in the earlier versions, KKh also states that Agastya does not return from his southern journey, but this fact is only a pretext to trigger the narration of a renewed Vārāṇasī mythology. The absent city becomes the cause for Agastya's longing as he recalls Vārāṇasī's incomparable beauty from his southern exile, and listens to Skanda who reveals him unknown wonders of his forsaken hometown. As with the case of Harikeśa, Agastya the ascetic becomes in the KKh Agastya the *bhakta*. The longing for Vārāṇasī (*kāśī-viraha*) thus appears as the main literary trope of the KKh to glorify the holy city.

Although the KKh integrates aspects of the earlier ascetic worldview into its renewed mythology, it does so not without introducing innovations that reveal a different sort of universe. Love becomes a factor in the cosmic process, which process is not exclusively governed by *karma*, *yajña* or *tapas*. The fire of asceticism (*tapas*) yields, as it were, to the fire of love (*viraha*), when in the frame story love is described as the purposeful drive that sets the entire cosmos into motion. To summarize: Mount Vindhya rises sky high in an attempt to outshine the splendour of Mount Meru, who is daily perambulated by the Sun. Vindhya obstructs the solar path and thus casts the universe into a standstill that generates extreme confusion: "everything became as though painted in a picture, because it remained where it was originally".[45] With a paralyzed Sun the worlds are sure to collapse sooner than later (2.26-29), and this agonic moment is poetically captured by the KKh. Deprived of their beloved Sun during an endless night spent in limbo, the quarters burn in longing as they realize that daybreak does not arrive. They release a loud cry that echoes throughout the universe reaching the

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[44]   MhBh, 3.(33)85.15, locates the hermitage of Agastya in the "eastern country", somewhere in the surroundings of Prayāga, in the neighbourhood of the Ganges (Bhāgirathī) (see also 3.97.25). The text also alludes to its presence in South India: "in the land of the Pāṇḍyas [there are] the Fords-of-Agastya-and-Varuṇa", as well as "Agastya's hermitage" (3.86.15-ff). SP 60.6-13 narrates the Vindhya episode but Agastya' s residence is not specified or connected to Benares: he goes to Vindhya but no information is given as to the sage's home. Yokochi (2004, 40) sustains that the layer of the SPbh in which this episode is narrated is not a later interpolation, since it follows MhBh 3.102.1-13 without altering the content or adding any "Śaiva adaptation". In this portion of the SP Agastya's appearance is quite innocuous featuring in only 4 ślokas (60.10-13). As a result, Agastya does not play any major role in the VMSP, where the main ascetic figures connected to Vārāṇasī are Harikeśa and Jaigīṣāvya.

In *Adhyātma-rāmāyaṇa* Rāma, Lakṣmana and Sītā meet Agastya south in the Deccan (somewhere in the Dandaka forest near to the Gomatī (Godavarī) river. Nothing is said of Agastya being a native from Benares. The same is the case in Vālmiki. AgS does not refer to the Vindhya episode.

[45]   KKh 2.26c-d: "*yadyatra tat sthitaṃ tatra citranyastam ivākhilam*".

ears of the *devas*, who on being urged travel to Vārāṇasī to seek the assistance of Agastya.

In this introductory passage, the KKh describes the Sun's dharma in a remarkable poetical way. It is not sacrifices but love what makes the Sun go round, journeying through the sky to pacify the quarters who have been enduring their dark hours longing for his return. (2.6b-13). *Viraha* animates, as it were, the cosmic process, and fulfilment of cosmic viraha is the Sun's dharma. At the very outset the viraha trope is incorporated in such a way that it becomes an integral component of the text's worldview.

Smith claims that it is in the KKh that the Agastya-Vindhya episode is connected with Vārāṇasī for the first time.[46] He seems to ignore, however, that the same episode is mentioned in another important source, namely, the *Devī-bhāgavata-purāṇa* (DBP), which represents a Śākta response to the popularity of the earlier BhP.[47] Hazra thinks DBP was written in Vārāṇasī between the 11 and 12 century,[48] but since the earliest available testimony for this text seems to be Śrīdhara-svāmī's commentary to BhP 1.1.1,[49] and since Śrīdhara was a Vaiṣṇava scholar who resided in Vārāṇasī sometime during the 14th – 15th century, Hazra's dating is hardly definitive. The text in fact is stratified in different layers borrowing passages from several sources such as the *Lakṣmītantra* and the *Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa* some of which passages are very late according to Yokochi.[50] Besides, the fact that the earliest testimonia for the KKh goes down to a similar period (15th century) would seem to indicate that both texts are more or

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[46] "It is interesting to note that, while the KKh is undoubtedly the first text which relates the old story of Agastya and the Vindhya mountain to Vārāṇasī, this account is so influential that later reworkings of this myth in the Tamil literature consider Agastya's reluctance to leave Kāśī as an essential component, even when the focus is another sacred place, as in the case with the Tamil *Kāñcīppurāṇam*. Davis, drawing the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* story from Eck's description, does not make a point of highlighting this as an innovation of that text and not a standard feature of the Vindhya story. In any case, the acceptance of the Kāśī motif as a part of later accounts of the Agastya-Vindhya narrative in Tamil is further testament to the transregional success of the KKh." Smith 2007, 163, note 305.

[47] Hazra (1958, 422) points that the DBP is said to be modelled upon BhP since it embodies the same amount of books (12) and verses (18000) claiming to be the real Bhāgavata-Purāṇa.

[48] On the provenance of the text, Hazra believes "the author of the Devī-bhāgavata was a Smārta Śākta Brahmin of Bengal and that he migrated to Benares, lived there for a long time, and then wrote the Devī-bhāgavata." Hazra 1958, 441. He further states that "*it is highly probable that the Devī-bhāgavata was compiled in the eleventh or twelfth century A.D.* Farquhar takes this Purāṇa to belong to the period ranging from 900 to 1350 A.D. This date of compilation of this work is fully supported by its Tantric elements as well as by the non-utilisation of its contents by the commentators and the Nibandha-writers." *Ibid.*, 427. Lakṣmīdhara quotes from a *Devīpurāṇa* (TVK, 11 and 12), but this source is not the DBP since the verses cited are not found in the latter.

[49] Hazra 1958, 424-425

[50] This information has been kindly shared to me in an email from 9/4/2007. Yokochi believes the DBP postdates the 12th century.

less contemporary.[51] They are even historically related, since when we look into the contents and compare, for instance, the renderings of the Agastya-Vindhya episode contained in each of them, we find striking parallels.[52] The plot is roughly the same but in volume the KKh version is larger than the DBP.[53] One thing we can be sure of is that one of our sources was aware of the other, and confronted it by borrowing some verses verbatim and modifying certain contents, as can be seen from the following table:

Verses in **DBP 10.3.14-21**	Verses in **KKh 2.6-25**	comments
14	6	partial
15	-	
16-17 ("Sūta uvāca")	13-14	almost verbatim
18	15cd-16ab ("Vyāsa uvāca")	almost verbatim
19cd	17ab	almost verbatim
20ab	17cd	common words
21cd	25ab	verbatim

A minor, though perhaps significant, difference is seen in the name of the narrators telling the episode in the respective sources. KKh (2.16) ascribes to Vyāsa the words that DBP puts in the mouth of Sūta. One could be tempted to infer from this small detail an earlier date for the DBP, assuming that it follows more closely the SP version of the same story, which is also narrated by Sūta. But this is not enough proof, and the DBP does not appear to borrow any verses from SP. In KKh, instead, it is Vyāsa who narrates the Agastya-Vindhya story to Sūta. These differences are likely to be historically meaningful. We may speculate that KKh substituted Vyāsa for the former story-teller of the Agastya-Vindhya episode, to make his audience believe in the priority and greater authoritativeness of which was going to become the frame story of the new mythology of Vārāṇasī. Further philological research into these passages may produce more answers than I am able to offer at present.

It is sometimes held as a criterion that whenever two historically related sources narrate the same story, it is the long and embellished version which is more likely to be the later. The version of the Agastya-Vindhya episode narrated

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[51]   These testimonia belong to "Vācaspatimiśra's *Tīrthacintāmani* [...] and Srīnātha's Telugu version of this text.". H. T. Bakker 1993, 22.

[52]   DBP does not borrow this episode neither from *Lakṣmītantra* nor *Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa*.

[53]   We have here a clear illustration of how the same narrative is manipulated to endorse the particular claims of different authors/traditions. Making use of a Vedic character, the MhBh introduces Agastya into a new plot to offer an etiological explanation of the Vindhya's height in the context of the Pāṇḍava's pilgrimage to the holy tīrthas (*tīrtha-yātrā*). The same story testifies to the origin of Goddess Vindhyavasinī in DBP, and in the KKh it provides the frame story to the subsequent narration of Vārāṇasī's holiness from the perspective of *viraha-bhakti*.

in the KKh is longer than the version of the DBP, and both these versions are in fact more profuse and detailed than the earlier accounts found in the MhBh or the SP. It is also possible, however, that original narratives become abbreviated in later sources hinting at an already well known story.[54] Therefore, a merely quantitative criterion based on the extension of a narrative is not always sufficient to assert a relative chronology, since we can infer either that the DBP abbreviated KKh or that KKh expanded DBP. This is why in order to establish which source was earlier, we need to look into qualitative aspects of the texts and their semantics.

Each text has its own bias. Whereas KKh describes Agastya as a devotee of Viśveśvara, DBP (10.4-5) introduces śākta adaptations turning Agastya into a worshipper of Devī. Devī accompanies Agastya to the Vindhya mountain and comes to reside there in the form of Vindhyavāsinī (DBP 10.7.1-21). Here is where the Agastya-Vindhya episode of the DBP ends abruptly, the seemingly overall purpose of the narrative being not to frame the praises of Vārāṇasī as in the KKh, but to provide an etiological myth for the origin of Goddess Vindhyavāsinī. The following table shows some parallels in the Agastya-Vindhya narrative present in both sources.

DBP	KKh
1. narrator: Suta to Rishis	1. narrator: Vyāsa to Suta
2. Nārada visits Vindhya (10.2)	2. Nārada visits Vindhya

3. Rise of Vindhya (10.3)
   a. quarters longing for the sun
   b. catastrophe
	3. Rise of Vindhya
	   a. quarters long for the sun
	   b. catastrophe

4. devas resort to Mahādeva (10.4)	4. devas resort to Brahmā
5. devas resort to Viṣṇu (10.5)	5. Agastya is a devotee of Viśveśvara a. long description of Agastya's hermitage in Vārāṇasī

6. Viṣṇu advices devas to proceed to Vārāṇasī and seek for the help of Agastya who is a worshipper of Devī (10.6)
   a. concise description of Vārāṇasī's natural setting
   b. rituals performed by devas are similar as in KKh but less numerous. Their restoration works in the city are not mentioned
   c. Lopamūdrā mentioned but not praised.
	b. more rituals and activities are said to be performed by the devas in Vārāṇasī than in DBP, including restoration works in the city.
	6. Lopamūdrā extensively praised in a chapter dealing with dharma and the normative role of a Hindu woman. This passage interrupts the flow of the narrative and is probable an interpolation.

7. Agastya leaves Kāśī (10.7) a. Sequence of holy places visited by Agastya in Vārāṇasī before his departure: Maṇikarṇikā, Viśveśvara, Daṇḍapāṇi,	7. Sequence of holy places visited by Agastya in Vārāṇasī before his departure: Kālabhairava, Ḍhuṇḍhi Vināyaka, etc.

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[54] In fact the later SP contains fewer verses than the MhBh while narrating this episode.

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	Kālabhairava, Sākṣi Gaṇeśa	
b.	Agastya's viraha for Kāśī (10.7.14)	
c.	Vindhyavāsinī	

This sketch needs to be discussed in further depth, but for now I would like to point out to one minor detail that might be of some relevance. First of all, both texts know their way in the city, as is seen from the topographic knowledge of holy places evinced above in DBP 7.a and KKh 7. Or, if we take point 6.b of DBP and contrast it with 5.b in KKh, we notice that there is something lacking in the former version of our story. This is a passage where the KKh narrates several works that the *devas* execute in Vārāṇasī during five nights, before seeking Agastya's favour to defeat the Vindhya. The passage is irrelevant for the plot in itself, but it tells about a number of charitable deeds that would seem to slip in something that our text is not willing to reveal outspokenly:

> "[The *devas* supplied] the visitors with food and wealth; students with colleges and large collections of books, and scribes with means of subsistence. Money was also allotted for the experts in the purāṇas to help out the temples. Manifold arrangements were done at temples to encourage the performance of songs and dances, along with plastering and restoring the dilapidated temple buildings in many different ways."[55]

The above is just a fragment of a much more detailed list of supplies the items of which show the *devas* engaging in a comprehensive project for restoring a town that has been severely damaged. The text gives us no clue as to what prompted this charitable reaction of the *devas*; what we are told is that their arrival coincided with a moment in time when the city was in great need of their aid.

Did the DBP consciously omit this passage or was it added by the KKh? The KKh may have introduced it as a means to explain some kind of catastrophe taking place in Vārāṇasī after the version of the DBP was written. I am tempted to interpret this passage as a veiled allusion to historical facts that our text carefully ignores while acknowledging, at the same time, their disastrous aftermath. It should be noted that this is not the only passage where the KKh describes the present condition of the holy city in such dramatic terms. The KKh seems here to be referring not so much to *devas* visiting the holy city as to a collective human effort for reconstructing Vārāṇasī after the iconoclastic arrival of Islam.

Let me now take a detour, while I continue to address the issue of the relative chronology between DBP and KKh on the basis of a semantic analysis.

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[55] "*maṭhair vidyārthinām annair atithy arthaṃ mahādhaniḥ / mahāpustakasambhārair lekhakānāś ca jīvanaiḥ // [...] purāṇapāṭhakāṃś vāpi pratidevālayaṃ dhanaiḥ / devālaye nṛtyagītakaraṇārthair anekaśaḥ // devālayasudhākāryair jīrṇoddhārair anekadhā /*" KKh 3.15 and 18-19b.

"Now that Jagadīśvarī has called upon me, I have no ulterior purpose. Today shall certainly befall what she has ordained. O great kings, today, while beholding the Universal Mother Bhavanī everywhere, what enemy can there be to me in this world? Noble kings, Mahāvidyā is be the chastiser of him who cultivates enmity against me. I know no hostility. Righteous kings, nothing is bound to occur except that which is predestined. I am one who always relies on Destiny (*daiva*), what concern is then to be kept regarding this matter? [...] O rulers of kings, she makes a king or a destitute whomever man she wishes, what then am I to be anxious about?" [58]

As is customary in the violent mythology of the Goddess, the story ends in a weighty slaughter. Devī slays the "lustful" kings and princes gathered at Śaśikalā's *svayaṃvara* thereby allowing Sudarśana to marry her and enjoy prosperity as the future king of Ayodhyā. Sudarśana of course takes no responsibility over the bloody outcome and blames the Goddess for killing his rivals while at the same time pointing to the victims' own bad karma.[59] In the meantime, and as he bids farewell to his daughter, king Subāhu requests Devī to remain in Vārāṇasī so that she may "always kill those people who are inauspicious".[60] Thus, our text explains how the consummation of a seemingly innocuous love affair fixed by Destiny, incidentally becomes the purposeful means to establish Devī worship in Vārāṇasī, a new cult that immediately acquires the same prestige and following as the city's main deity:

"Thereupon all the people [in Kāśī] were filled with loving devotion [*premabhakti*] towards Her, performing her worship in the same orthodox manner as they worshipped Viśveśvara." [61]

The mention of Viśveśvara in this context reveals that by the time the DBP was being composed this deity was already the major one in Vārāṇasī. Perhaps this was the situation already before the KKh was written.[62] But it is noteworthy that a particular type of Devī bhakti is here described as *prema* (love), since this type of emotional worship, which in the DBP appears as an outstanding

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[58]   DBP 3.20.21-24 and 26. "*nānyac cikīrṣitaṃ me 'dya mām āha jagadīśvarī / tayā yad vihitaṃ tac ca bhavitā 'dya na śaṃśayaḥ // na śatrur asti saṃsare ko 'py atra jagadīśvarāḥ / sarvatra paśyato me 'dya bhavānīṃ jagadambikām // yaḥ kariṣyati śatrutvaṃ mayā saha nṛpātmajāḥ / śāstā tasya mahāvidyā nāhaṃ jānāmi śatrutām // yad bhāvi tad vai bhavitā nānyathā nṛpasattamāḥ / kā cintā hy atra kartavyā daivādhīno 'smi sarvadā // [...] sā yaṃ cikīrṣate bhūpaṃ taṃ karoti nṛpādhipāḥ / nirdhanaṃ vā naraṃ kāmaṃ kā cintāvai tadā mama //*" Significantly, verse 3.20.43 assimilates fate (*daiva*) to one's own karma.

[59]   See DBP 3.25.1-10.

[60]   DBP 3.24.9c-d : "*abhadraṇaṃ vinaśaṃ ca kuru lokasya sarvadā*".

[61]   DBP 3.25.42: "*tatra tasyā janāḥ sarve premabhaktiparāyaṇāḥ / pūjāṃ cakrur vidhānena yathā viśveśvarasya ha*".

[62]   Gāhadavāla inscriptions point to the *navarātrī* as a major cult already in 12th century Vārāṇasī (see Eck 1982, 174), and DBP 3.26-27 deals extensively with this tantric *navarātri pūjā* which implies the presence of a *kumārī* (a female virgin) for which selection there are very strict rules (see DBP 3.27.1-7).

Fate (*daiva*) and endeavour (*udyama*) in the devotional backgrounds of DBP and KKH

The role of *viraha* in the worldview of the KKh is more prominent than in the DBP, which propounds an extremely fatalistic vision of cosmic and human events with Devī revealing herself as a nemesis unto which one should unquestionably surrender, to venerate Destiny (*daiva*) as the holy will of the Goddess.[56]

The theme is all pervading in the DBP. It appears in different narratives, for instance in the *svayaṃvara* episode dealing with the elopement of Sudarśana and Śaśikalā from the royal palace of Vārāṇasī. The princess falls deeply in love of an ascetic she has never seen before in her life, but who has been introduced to her in a dream. While she endures the pangs of *viraha* (3.18.3-11), king Subāhu, her father, convokes a *svayaṃvara* in order to appease her daughter, but Sudarśana is no serious a candidate for becoming her husband because as a child ascetic he has no wealth, gallantry or kingdom.

The ensuing "love story" illustrates the overpowering will of the Goddess against whom no human custom or initiative can prevail. Even the fact of falling in love is explained as a fatality, as if though the Goddess determined the emotions of the human heart (3.19.12-13), and so the lovers decide to unite after being "ordered" by the Goddess to do so (3.19.21). Before setting to attend Śaśikalā's *svayaṃvara* at Vārāṇasī, Sudarśana the boy explains himself to his mother, but instead of displaying his feelings for Śaśikalā –for whom he appears to have none and from whom he has received a love letter- he rationalises the whole affair with a resigned philosophical discourse that would hardly conquer the heart of any passionate lover:

> "What has to happen is what ultimately befalls; there is no concern to be entertained on this respect. At the command of the Universal Mother I now proceed to the *svayaṃvara* " [57]

Other instances of this fatalistic outlook are emphasised by Sudarśana when he arrives in Vārāṇasī and addresses the *svayaṃvara* hall to pacify his anxious contenders who know about Śaśikalā's bias for him:

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[56]   The theological identity between God (*bhagavān*) and Destiny (*daiva*) is rather uncommon in Hindu mythology and is lacking in the early epic literature. In his study on *Fate, Predestination and Human Action in the Mahābhārata*, P. Hill concludes: "even with the common term *daiva* – an adjectival term of *deva* or god, which literally translates as 'the divine'- where the emphasis is on human bondage, the context leaves little doubt that what is meant is a force that is beyond human beings and that is *independent of the control of a particular God*, or the gods in general. In these cases, *no deity can be said to appropriate the force, own it or be identical with it*." P. Hill, 2001, 367 my italics. The identity between Destiny (*daiva*) and divine will would therefore seem to be a particularity of the Goddess mythology and in this respect the DBP is perhaps the most outstanding example.

[57]   DBP 3.19.31cd-32ab. "*bhavitavyaṃ bhavaty eva nātra kāryā vicāraṇā / ādeśāc ca jaganmātur gacchāmy adya svayaṃvare*"

feature in Devī literature, is derived from an emotional cult focusing on Śiva/Viśveśvara for which there is no earlier literary precedent than the KKh. This kind of devotion is further specified in DBP as *bhakti-yoga*, a term we have already encountered in the KKh while dealing with Harikeśa's *viraha*, who in his fervour for Śiva manifested a form of devotion (*bhakti*) that was spontaneous (*nirākṛtim*), self-fulfilled and seeking no reward (*nirākāṅkṣam*).[63] Both the KKh and the DBP understand this *bhakti-yoga* in a way that lays greater stress on emotions than the 'intelectual' sort of devotion the *Bhagavadgītā* comprises under the same term. Thus, after praising *bhakti* as the highest yoga superseding *karma* and *jñāna*, the DBP describes different types of *bhakti* in accordance with the *guṇa* theory of *saṃkhya* philosophy, to proclaim the highest form of devotion (*para-bhakti*) as a supernatural fervour not qualified by any *guṇa* (*nirguṇa*) and seeking no reward beyond itself:

> "[the parabhākta] has no desire for *sāmīpya*, *sārṣṭi*, *sāyujya* or *sālokya* and knows nothing higher than my service, and engrossed in my service does not fancy to be liberated. O mighty one, he who has faith in the miraculous sight (*darśan*) of my holy place and of my devotees, faith in the hearing of my śāstras, mantras, tantras, etc., possesses deep love for me, has his hairs standing always on their ends, his eyes filled with loving tears, his voice being blocked at the throat." [64]

Such characterization of supreme *bhakti* as an intense emotional outburst giving rise to all these bodily symptoms and being an ecstatic aim even beyond *mokṣa*, is clearly modelled after the BhP, a Vaiṣṇavite text written in south India during the 9th century for which the DBP stands as an epigone. The BhP exported this particular brand of devotion (*prema* or *viraha bhakti*) to the north of the country, and influenced the theistic milieu of Hinduism at large including the Śākta (DBP) and the Śaivite (KKh) mythologies. Although I cannot deal with this crucial issue at present, the above evidence points to the striking fact that even in the non-Vaiṣṇavite milieux of north India, *viraha bhakti* was developed after the blueprint of this essential text the tremendous impact of which would transform the religious history of Hindu theistic traditions.

Worshipping Devī in this fervent manner did not preclude her devotees from developing a resigned vision of human existence. The violent and fatalistic worldview we find so much emphasised in the DBP is part of a larger complex of religious ideas that impregnate the Devī cult, at least in purāṇic mythological sources such as the *Devī-māhātmya* (DM), where we find deep reflections on the

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63   KKh 32.143c.
64   DBP 7.37.13c-14, 19-20. *"sāmīpyasārṣṭisāyujyasālokyānāṃ na caiṣaṇā // matsevāto 'dhikaṃ kiṃcin naiva jānāti karhicit / sevyasevakakatābhāvāttatra mokṣaṃ na vaṃcati // [...] matsthānadarśane śraddhā madbhaktadarśane tathā / macchāstraśravaṇe śraddhā mantratantrādiṣu prabho // mayi premākulamatī romāñcitatanuḥ sadā / premāśrujalapūrṇakṣa kaṇṭhagadgadanisvanaḥ //"*.

deterministic role of Mahāmāyā and the way She labours deceiving the mind of creatures to keep the world functioning under a veil of delusion.[65]

A very different picture emerges as soon as we turn to the KKh. The cosmic role of *viraha* reveals a worldview that contrasts with the fatalistic concept of an omnipotent Goddess that is invariably victorious overruling the life of beings and granting no space for personal freedom. Although the Devī cult is duly acknowledged in the KKh, the KKh does so in its own particular terms without following the standard of the DBP. As a Śivaite work it does not preach Devī monotheism but rather relocates Devī under the authority of Śiva.[66] More importantly, the KKh opposes the DBP on one major issue, namely the relation between fate and free will. This point is treated at several instances throughout the text, and although KKh is not always self-consistent, most of the times the outcome is not a fatalistic one but an optimistic appraisal of courage and insightful action.[67] Thus in a charming story where a pigeon couple cleverly manages to set themselves free from the claws of a large hawk, KKh (76.74-76) instructs that "endeavour" (*udyama*) is recommended in the midst of adversity and should be resorted to for increasing one's own good luck. A similar morale is reached when the KKh deals with Devī mythology. When a *daitya* called Durga overthrows the *devas* from their venerable positions of power, great chaos sweeps the land:

> "The Brahmins stopped studying the Veda tormented by the fear they had of him. His unbearable troops crushed the sites consecrated for sacrifices. Many chaste women were harassed by them followers of evil ways.Undefeated, those evil ones enjoyed the property of others stealing it away by force, exhibiting merciless behaviour. Rivers diverted from their courses and the holy fires ceased to blaze. Perplexed as they were out of fear of those evil ones, alas, the luminaries did not shine. The charming ladies that are the cardinal regions were found lacking in splendour on every side. Orthodox rites were ruined and other ones were chosen to be performed; turning themselves into clouds that showered rain arbitrarily. Approached by disaster they were tormented with fear, people did not even honour the *devas* with a mere greeting once they had entered their homes."[68]

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[65]   In this respect see the significant dialogue between the king and the merchant, and the sage's striking answer to their doubts in DM 1.1-44. For Devī as embodying fortune and misfortune in the life of creatures see 4.4, 5.26 and 12.37.

[66]   See KKh 71.23-24.

[67]   Thus, while KKh 67.54-58 attempts to reconcile both fate and karma, in KKh 32.30-32 we find a straightforward opposition against the doctrine of fate, enjoining "manliness" (*pauruṣam*) and devotion to Iśvara as means to subduing karma.

[68]   " *na vedādhyayanam cakrur brahmaṇās tadbhayārditāḥ / yajñavāṭāvinirdhvastās tadbhaṭair atiduḥsahaiḥ // vidhvastābahuśaḥ sādhvyastair amārgakṛtās padaiḥ / prasabhaṃ ca parasvāni apattṛtya durāsadāḥ // abhokṣiṣur durācārāḥ krurakarmaparigrahāḥ / nadyo vimārgagā āsañ jvalanti na tathāgnayaḥ // jyotīṃṣin apradīpyanti tadbhayākulitāny aho / digvadhūvasanany āsan vicchāyāni samaṃtataḥ // dharmakriyā viluptāś ca pravṛtāḥ sukṛtetarāḥ / ta eva jaladībhūya vavṛṣur nija līlayā // [...] martyā amartyān svagṛhaṃprāptān api bhayārditāḥ / api sambhāṣamātreṇa nārccayanti vipajjuṣaḥ /"* KKh 71.7-11ab and 14.

The passage describes a situation of plundering and traditional institutions being targeted by the hostile presence of an alien power. The consequence of violating the hallowed religious heritage leads to cosmic repercussions, and certainly in our text to splendid exaggerations. Passages such as this are by no means exceptional in the mythic literature dealing with *asuras*, but here the text might be dramatically referring to the way in which Islam imposed itself on the city. This humiliating predicament could not be welcomed as a fact of Providence or the outcome of a Divine Will by the author(s) of KKh. Instead, the text generates its own response calling in for human resilience and divine retaliation:

> "They are never auspicious who during times of misfortune are impelled by misery to approach the company of those whose mind is soiled by wealth. [...] Only they live in this world, only they are receptors of merit, whose ocean-deep minds do not forsake profoundness even as they face adversity. At times there is rise in success, at others misfortune crops up. Meeting both due to fate (*daiva*), the clever one does not exhaust his courage (*dhairyam*).[69] O praiseworthy one, wise men should consider the rise and fall of both of them. Since joy and sorrow are both transitory, equanimity must never be abandoned, but he who is overwhelmed by affliction after meeting adversity is miserable. Since both worlds are lost to such a man affliction must be shunned. For those who remain courageous even during calamity here in this world and in the world beyond, misfortune shall not touch them being wiped out by their courage. The sages [the *devas*] who had been deprived of their kingdom resorted to Maheśa, whereupon the Omniscient [Siva] released Devī to crush the asura."[70]

A stark contrast can be appreciated between the tone of this passage and Sudarśana's fatalistic discourse in DBP. KKh is here preaching an ethos of resilience in a context where Hindu religion has been humiliated and therefore cannot consent to the present state of affairs.

Insofar as myth is the imaginary effort of a people aiming to transcend the vicissitudes of its own time, mythology is a dependent variable of the historical context to which it belongs. Abiding by this hermeneutic presupposition that considers mythology not only as a symbolic mindset for religious beliefs but also as an archaic form of historic awareness largely influenced, if not inspired, by real facts, I would now like to risk some speculative conclusions which, on account of

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[69]   I choose to follow Tagare's translation in this respect and render "*dhairyam*" as "courage", although it could also mean "patience". I prefer the first alternative because it conveys a less fatalistic connotation.

[70]   "*vipady api hite dhanyā na ye dainyapraṇoditāḥ / dhanair malinacittānām ālabhante gaṇaṃ kvacit // [...] ta eva loke jivanti puṇyabhājasta eva vai / vipady api na gambhiryaṃ yac cetobdhiḥ parityajet // kadācit sampad udayaḥ kadācid vipad udgamaḥ / daivād dvayam api prāpya dhīro dhairyaṃ na hā payet / udayānudayau prājñair draṣṭavyau puṣpavan tayoḥ / sadaikarūpatā 'tyājyā harṣāharṣau tato 'dhruvau // yas tv āpadaṃ samāsādya dainyagrasto vipadyate // tasya lokadvayaṃ naṣṭaṃ tasmād dainyaṃ vivarjayet // āpady api hi ye dhīrā iha loke paratra ca / na tān punaḥ spṛśed āpat taddhairyeṇāvādhīr iti // bhraṣṭarājyāś ca vibudhā maheśaṃ śaraṇaṃ gatāḥ / sarvajñena tato devī presitā 'suramardane //*" KKh 71.16 and 18-23.

33

the above analyses, might not be farfetched. I would contend that the DBP is a text not earlier than the 13ᵗʰ century which intends to boost Devī worship in Vārāṇasī after the Islamic conquest of the city, at a time when Viśveśvara has raised to prominence becoming the major Śaiva temple of the city.[71] To this conquest KKh reacts not without resentment, interpreting the Muslim presence in the city as an evil force identified as a Daitya army, calling in for resilience, and placing Śiva-Viśveśvara on top of the divine hierarchy to instruct the mighty Goddess, puffed up by the recent success of her worshippers, to banish the Muslims.[72]

In such historical predicament, and given the previous mythological mindset of the Śākta cult (as evinced for instance in the DM), DBP reemphasises the fatalistic equation Destiny (*daiva*) = (the divine will of) Devī, without lamenting the diminished state of the city which seems to have incidentally benefited the local cult of the Goddess. In fact the fatalistic outlook that pervades the DBP's worldview does not seem to express any *malaise* with the new turn of events in Vārāṇasī. The same is not the case with the venerators of Viśveśvara, who are obviously unable to lay back and fan themselves on the ruins of their devastated temples. They cannot take this historical turn for granted as if it manifested Śiva's will (whose impotence is by the way significantly revealed in the narrative of his exile to the Mandara mountain), and therefore the KKh counters fatalism with a call for restoration and resilience, developing a very different philosophy of "endeavour" (*udyoga*) that opposes the conformist view promoted by DBP.

If this is accurate and the DBP belongs to this period, the KKh must have been written down between the late 13ᵗʰ and 14ᵗʰ century. I shall try to substantiate this further by turning to a specific chapter in the KKh which provides more evidence for establishing a relative chronology.

Kāśī-yoga in KKh 41

KKh 41 stands out for its detailed knowledge on yogic lore, certainly not a favourite hit of the *māhātmya* genre, as any reader is likely to confirm towards the end of the chapter (quoted extensively below). The long discussion on the

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[71]   Although Hazra claims this text was written in Vārāṇasī between the 11 and 12 century, this seems rather contradictory considering that: "The way in which the Mlecchas and the Yavanas have been mentioned repeatedly in the Devī-bhāgavata, tends to show that the author of this Purāṇa was quite familiar with the spread of Muhammadans in India." Hazra, 1958, 421. If such were the case, the text is more likely to be of a later date than the one he proposes, certainly closer to the one I suggest given the fact that until 1194 Vārāṇasī was still ruled by a Hindu dynasty. Pintchman (1994, 129), apparently following Mackenzie Brown (1990), proposes 1000-1200 as a date for the DBP, but on unexplained grounds.

[72]   See KKh 71.23-24.

different limbs (*aṅga*) of yogic discipline conflates several ascetic traditions in an overarching manner, including the Vaikānasas[73] and an obscure yoga of six-limbs (*ṣaḍaṅga*). In a footnote to his translation, this last *ṣaḍaṅga-yoga* is explained by Tagare as an abridged form of Patañjali's *aṣṭāṅga* minus *yama* and *niyama*. Although KKh 41.59 numbers these six ancillaries as: *āsana, prāṇasaṃrodha, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā dhyāna* and *samādhī*, our text introduces some tantric practices not mentioned in the *Yogasūtra*. Tagare is on the wrong track, since this yogic tradition that KKh is willing to address in a most critically ingenious way, is likely to be referring to a particular Śaivite *sādhana* known as the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* evincing "evident terminological overlap with the Aṣṭāṅgayoga of Patañjali".[74] This *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga* is in fact known to us from different sources such as VMSP, where it receives a passing mention in 27.46, and also from the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra*, a Śaiva Siddhānta work that dedicates an entire chapter to it.[75] This is an important issue that shall allow us to determine the precise yogic tradition the KKh is willing to target.

The long discourse on these yogic feats culminates with a surprising turn whereby the KKh reformulates the ascetic *sādhana* in devotional terms, as a form of pilgrimage. Yogic practices appear excessively strenuous and unnecessary when the comparatively easier Kāśī-yoga is recommended as a shortcut to liberation:

> "O Agastya, there are only two ways for nirvāṇa: either to cast off one's body in Kāśī or [practicing] such yoga as this. On account of the increase of sins during the Kali age and the mental dispositions produced by the fickle sense-organs, how can there be any realization of yoga here for men of limited lifespan? Since the mercifull Viśveśvara is permanently established in Kāśī, creatures shall easily attain liberation (*kaivalya*) within the city, though not elsewhere nor through means such as yoga and the like. Proper yoga is declared to be the union with one's own body in Kāśī; nobody is liberated here through any other yoga. Viśveśvara, Viśālākṣī, the Gaṅgā river, Kālabhairava, the auspicious Gaṇeśa and Daṇḍapāṇi – this is exactly the Yoga of Six Limbs (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*). He who continuously performs this *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* at Kāśī relishes ambrosia after yielding to the long-lasting yogic sleep. Oṃkāra, Kṛttivāsā, Kedāra, Triviṣṭapa, Viśveśvara and Viśveśa – this is exaclty the Yoga of Six Limbs (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*). [...] O highest of men, after practicing this *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* in Kāśī a creature is never reborn into a mother's womb. Bathing in the Gaṅgā is the Mahāmudrā, destructor of great sins – even one who practices this *mudra* shall reach immortality. Strolling in the streets of Kāśī is Khecarīmudrā – observing this Khecarīmudrā one is immediately born as a Khecara. Soaring (*uḍḍīya*) from all regions towards Vārāṇasī – this great yogic bond (*mahābandha*) known as

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[73]   In the *Gautama Dharmasūtra* the Vaikānasas are described as ascetics of the fourth *āśrama*. See Bronkhorst 1998, 29-30.

[74]   Vasudeva 2004, 376.

[75]   On *ṣaḍaṅga-yoga* in the context of VMSP 27.46 see SPIIA, 202. *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* in *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* 17, see Vasudeva 2004, 367-436. In the introduction to his edition, Vasudeva tells us he "has neglected to investigate the complicated relation that the Saiddhāntika Ṣaḍaṅgayoga taught in *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* 17 bears to Pāśupata yogas". Vasudeva 2004, xii.

Uḍḍīyāṇa prepares for liberation. [...] O sage, I have explained to you of a twofold yoga that was [previously] expounded by Śambhu [Śiva] for the sake of liberation: the one consisting of *ṣaḍaṅga* and the other consisting of *mudra*. One should be devoted to yoga as long as one is not constrained by the waning of the sense organs [and] as long as one still has time left. Between both yogas the best is this Kāśī-yoga; practicing it one shall reach the highest state of realization." [76]

The above passage is, I think, eloquent enough to speak for itself. We shall return to it below, while drawing some conclusions.

Although KKh does not refer explicitly to any yogic source, it hints to well known authorities that a versed pundit would immediately recognize. Not that I am one of them, but if we compare some passages of KKh 41 with other yogic manuals we notice interesting concordances. Aware of such parallels, the commentator of KKh ascribes these verses to Svātmārāma's *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* (HYP). Comparing KKh 41 with the verses of the HYP, we note that these are quoted in random order, eventually in clusters that do not always match the sequence of the original. Considering that HYP is an anthology that compiles yogic instructions from a range of earlier sources, and that scholars tend to ascribe this text to a date that is too late (1500) for the KKh to have borrowed from it (given that the first testimonia for KKh date already from the 15th century), the actual role of the HYP in the composition of KKh 41 becomes problematic. Certain clues point to a more complex textual context. Thus, KKh 41.60 states that :

"There are as many āsanas as there are living species of creatures" (*āsanānīha tāvanti yāvantyo jīvayonayaḥ*).

Absent in the HYP, this passage is quoting an earlier source which Brahmānanda, commenting on HYP (1.33), ascribes to Gorakṣa:

tad uktam gorakṣanāthena āsanānīha ca tāvanti yāvantyo jīvajātayaḥ

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[76] "*ubhe eva hi nirvāṇavartmanī kila kumbhaja / kiṃ vā kāśyāṃ tanutyāgaḥ kiṃ vā yogo ' yam īdṛśaḥ // cañcalendriyavṛttitvāt kalikalmaṣajṛmbhaṇāt / alpāyuṣāṃ tathā nṛṇāṃ kveha yogamahodayaḥ // sadaiva sa dayāvardhiḥ kāśyāṃ viśveśvaraḥ sthitaḥ / kāśyāṃ sukhena kaivalyaṃ yathā labhyeta jantubhiḥ / yogayuktādyupāyaiśca na tathā 'nyatra kutracit // kāśyāṃ svadehasaṃyogaḥ samyag yoga udāhṛtaḥ / mucyate neha yogena kṣipram anyena kenacit // viśveśvaro viśālākṣī dyunadī kālabhairavaḥ / śrīmān ḍhuṇḍhir daṇḍapāṇiḥ ṣaḍaṅgo yoga eṣa vai // etat ṣaḍaṅgaṃ yo yogaṃ nityaṃ kāśyāṃ niṣevate / samprāpya yoganidrāṃ sa dīrghām amṛtam aśnute // oṃkāraḥ kṛttivāsāś ca kedāraś ca triviṣṭapaḥ / viśveśvaro 'tha viśveśa ṣaḍaṅga yoga eṣa vai // [...] ṣaḍaṅgasevanād asmād vārāṇasyāṃ narottama / na jātu jāyate jantur jananījaṭhare punaḥ // gaṅgasnānaṃ mahāmudrā mahāpātakanāśino / etan mudrākṛtābhyāso 'py amṛtatvam avāpnuyāt // kāśīvīthiṣu sañcāro mudrā bhavati khecarī / khecaro jāyate nūnaṃ khecaryā mudrayā 'nayā // uḍḍīya sarvato deśādyānaṃ vārāṇasīṃ prati / uḍḍīyāṇo mahābandha eṣa muktyai prakalpate // [...] iti yogaḥ samākhyāto mayā te dvividho mune / saṣaḍaṅgaḥ samudraśca muktaye śambhubhāṣitaḥ // yāvan nendriyavaiklavyaṃ bādhate / yāvat kālavilambo 'sti tāvad yogarato bhavet // ubhayor yogayor madhye kāśīyogo 'yam uttamaḥ / kāśīyogaṃ samabhasya prāpnuyād yogam uttamam //*" KKh 41.167-174, 176-179, 182-184.

36

We know that the *Gorakṣaśataka* (GŚ) was one of the sources from which the HYP borrowed several of its verses.[77] Except for a minor particle (*ca / tu*), the aforementioned verse occurs verbatim in two different editions of this text, as:

> *āsanāni tu tāvanti yāvatyo jīva-jātayaḥ /*
> *eteṣām akhilān bhedān vijānāti maheśvaraḥ //* [78]

More important is the fact that immediately preceding the aforementioned verse of KKh, in 41.59, the limbs of the sixfold yoga are numbered in the same order as the six ancillaries acknowledged in the GŚ:

> *āsanaṃ prāṇasaṃyāmaḥ pratyāhāro'tha dhāraṇā*
> *dhyānaṃ samādhir etāni yogāṅgāni bhavanti ṣaṭ* [79]

This evidence invites us to look beyond the HYP in order to ascertain the source(s) used by KKh 41. The following chart illustrates some concordances between KKH, HYP, and two scholarly editions of the GŚ:

KKh 41	HYP	GŚ (1) Lonavla edition	GŚ (2) Briggs edition	Comments
59	-	4	7	almost verbat.
60	-	5ab	8ab	almost verbat.
73	2.3	-	91	verbat. only with GŚ
83	2.5	-	95	different word order
84	2.7	43	96	verbat. only with GŚŚ
125c-d	4.5c-d	-	-	almost. verbat.
126a-b	4.6a-b	94a-b	-	verbat. only with HYP
126c-d	4.6c-d	94c-d	-	not verbat.
129	4.108			almost verbat.
140-142	3.15-17	80 and 82[80]	60-62	140 verbat. only in HYP
146	-	-	70	
147	3.56	-	77	verbat.
148	3.57	-	78	not verbat.
149-152	3.72,61,65	36-38	79-82	different order in HYP

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77   See Bouy 1994.

78   GŚ (1) 5a-b, and GŚ (2) 8a-b.

79   GŚ (1) 4 and (2) 7. Discussing the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* of GŚ, Vasudeva would seem to exonerate Tagare when he points that "the order of its ancillaries, though there are only six of them, reflects rather a truncated form of Patañjala yoga" Vasudeva 2004, 378. For *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* in Gorakṣa's *haṭhayoga,* see the *Śārṅgadharapaddhati* śl. 4373-4419 according to Peterson's edition, referred to in Bouy 1994 28, note 101.

As we have said, the Rāmānandī commentator of KKh rightly points that many of the verses found in this chapter are also present in HYP, but he never refer these verses to the GŚ.[81] Bouy, on the other hand, seems correct when he claims that the original source for KKh 41 is not the HYP but the GŚ:

> "En ce qui concerne la date de cet ouvrage [Gorakṣaśataka] on notera qu'il est antérieur au *Kasikhanda* du *Skandapurana* [sic] ou, plus exactement, au chapitre I.41, intitulé *Yogakhyana*, du *Kasikhanda*. En effet, l'auteur de ce chapitre (« 189 » strophes), pour rédiger les strophes 59 à 158, en général soit s'est inspiré du texte du *Gorakṣaśataka*, soit l'a recopié littéralement, sans doute tel qu'il devait se présenter à son époque et dans sa région. L'auteur de la *Hathapradipika* (XVe siècle), quant à lui, a emprunté, directement ou indirectement, un grand nombre de strophes – une cinquantaine – au *Gorakṣaśataka*. [...] Le *Gorakṣaśataka* est un ouvrage relativement ancien, que l'on peut considérer, dans l'état actuel des connaissances, comme étant au moins antérieur au XIVe siècle. »[82]

Which exactly was the source from which KKh 41 borrowed its verses on yogic lore is something we might not be able to ascertain from the above table. KKh 41.149-152 seems to be borrowing directly from GŚ (1 or 2) probably at a stage before the HYP was compiled, this on account of verse order, and also because some experts argue that HYP 3.61 and 3.65 proceed from GŚ. [83] But on the other hand, KKh 41.140-142 might be following a different work quoted by HYP since KKh is not verbatim with the GŚ sources and a similar remark seems applicable to KKh 41.147-148. It is noteworthy that the above list of KKh verses is not entirely contained in any of the parallel sources, and this piece of evidence seems compelling enough not to assume that it was only one of these sources that the author of KKh 41 had in front of his eyes. KKh (41.125) seems in fact to be directly quoting HYP (4.5c-d), or another yogic source compiled in HYP different from GŚ, while describing *samādhi* as the union between self and mind. In these almost verbatim verses, KKh substitutes the original passive verb (*abhidhīyate*)

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80   Bouy (1994, 25 note 78) derives HYP 3.15-17 from GŚ (1) 80-82, but this is rare since verse 81 is missing in the Lonavla edition of GŚ used by Bouy.

81   *An observation regarding the commentators of HYP and KKh*: Each commentator is aware of the other's source text. Commenting HYP, Brahmānanda quotes from KKh 41.90; 41.94-96, in pp. 40-41; KKh 41.21 in p. 132; KKh 41.134c-d and164 in pp. 31 and 180 respectively. In these last two passages the text does not match exactly the KKh edition. Thus : *yadaibhir antarāyair na kṣipyate 'sya hi mānasam / tadāgre tam avāpnoti paraṃ brahmātidurlabham //* Compare with KKh 164: *yady ebhir antarāyair na kṣipyate 'syeha mānasam / tadāgre tat samāpnoti padaṃ brahmādidurlabham.* Whenever Brahmānanda quotes from the KKh he refers to it as "Skanda Purāṇa", none of which verses correspond to the verses that the HYP actually shares verbatim with the KKh. Conversely, the Rāmānandi commentator of KKh usually singles them out, though the version of the HYP used by him is not identical with Brahmānanda's or to the one used by Bouy.

82   Bouy 1994, 25.

83   See Bouy 1994, 40 and note 155.

with a synonymous form of two syllables less (*bhaṇyate*) to introduce a two-syllabled particle (*iha*) that would point towards something – a book – which is in front of our author. Thus:

KKh 41.125c-d: *tathātmamanasor aikyaṃ samādhir iha bhaṇyate*

HYP 4.5c-d: *tathātmamanasor aikyaṃ samādhir abhidhīyate* [84]

If the HYP belongs to the late 15th century, as Bouy claims, it would be impossible for the KKh to quote it.[85] If, on the other hand, Bouy was correct and the source for KKh 41 was some unavailable form of the GŚ, establishing the *terminus a quo* for this text would be of great help for fixing the date of the KKh on text critical grounds. Unfortunately, Bouy only provides us with a *terminus ad quem* (14th century). How elastic can this terminus be is not easy to know, but in the chronological table at the end of his book, Buoy himself tentatively ascribes the GŚ to the surroundings of 1300.[86] This would place the KKh at a date later than the 11th century (proposed by Smith), especially considering that the Nātha-yogi movement did not become prominent in India until the 13th century,[87] a time not earlier than which the author of the KKh would have been ready to take this tradition seriously into account, and confront it by quoting from one of its major texts in a condescending, yet respectful, manner. Needless to say that the textual evidence discussed thus far grants no relief to Smith's theory.

At certain passages that fall out of chapter 41, the author(s) of the KKh pays its respects to the venerable Pāśupata tradition which, by this time, has vanished from the historical scene. At the same time, KKh 41 confronts the emergent Nāth yogī movement through the verses it quotes from the GŚ before letting us know about its striking reinterpretation of *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* as Kāśī-yoga. This is understandable since the Pāśupata tradition exhibited more tolerance towards temple religion than did the Nāth yogīs, who in their strict asceticism were not at all concerned with pilgrimages. With their sophisticated system of homologies between micro and macro cosmic realities, Nāth yogīs developed notions that converted pilgrimage into something that could be achieved through meditation rather than through actual physical journey to holy places.[88] These

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[84]   The same strategy is repeated immediately afterwards in KKh 41.126c-d with respect to HYP 4.6c-d and GŚ (1) 94c-d, where none of the latter introduce the *iha* particle.

[85]   KKh 41.43-53 seems to be echoing a view that enjoins *hātha yoga* only as a means for *rāja yoga*. This is significant because such is the view endorsed by HYP (1.1-3; 2.73cd-77; 4.77-80 and 103). Could these verses of the KKh be alluding to the specific yogic milieu behind the composition of the HYP?

[86]   See Bouy 1994,118.

[87]   See *ibid.*, 111.

[88]   Other methods for internalising holy space by homologating it to yogic physiology include *kāya sādhana* and *yogapīṭha*. See Entwistle 1987, 246-ff. For a sample of yogic hostility towards pilgrimage see HYP 1.61 and Brahmānanda's commentary referring to Gorakṣa, where

sophisticated practices would not appeal to the lay people on a massive scale, but the movement had an important popular backing when Gorakṣanātha came to be identified as an incarnation of Śiva.[89] This support must have been strong enough for the Śivaite author(s) of KKh to take the Nāth-yogī corpus seriously into account. The fact that the Nāth yogis are not explicitly named reveals an important strategy of the text, which is to encompass different Hindu traditions through Inclusivismus, redefining rival practices such as the yoga of six-limbs (ṣaḍaṅga-yoga), and thus controlling an otherwise antinomian religious movement which uncompromisingly rejected the ideology of pilgrimage and temple worship the KKh aimed to broadcast. If these medieval yogic disciplines conceived the human body as a temple and were therefore inimical to Hindu temple religion, the māhātmya elaborated its own creative response by reifying yogic discipline (ṣaḍaṅga yoga) into holy space. In this respect, KKh 41 is consistent with the overall ideology of the sthala-māhātmya echoing other passages such as KKh 5.25-26, where the three rivers (nadī) demarcating the holy territory of the Avimukta-kṣetra are homologated in a pun with the veins (nāḍī) of the yogic body, to sanctify Vārāṇasī as a land of redemption not for yogis but for any fortunate soul who happens to attain death/samādhi within its precinct:

> "In fact, that [sage] Jābāli spoke thus: O Āruṇi, the Asi river is [esoterically] considered to be the Iḍā, [while] the Varaṇā is the tubular conduct (nāḍī) known as Piṅgala. Avimukta lies in between them (Asi and Varaṇā). The supreme nāḍī known as Suṣumnā is there. Yet Vārāṇasī comprises the three (nāḍīs). Here, Hara recites that Tāraka Brahman into the ear of every dying creature, by means of which they become Brahman."[90]

KKh is here referring to the Jābāla Upaniṣad (JU), a brief text that in no more than two pages deals chiefly with yoga and renunciation (saṃyāsa). As with the case of the ṣaḍaṅga yoga in KKh 41, here the authority of JU is invoked, not without distorting the original import of the text, to reify yogic physiology into the holy geography of Vārāṇasī.[91]

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pilgrimage, sacrifices and women are to be shunned by the practitioner of yoga, for these are only fit for householders.

[89]   See Briggs 1938, 181.

[90]   "sa hovāceti jābālir āruṇe 'siriḍā matā / varaṇā piṅgalānāḍī tadantas tv avimuktakam // sā suṣumnā parā nāḍī trayaṃ vārāṇasī tv asau / tad atrotkramaṇe sarvajantūnāṃ hi śrutau haraḥ // tārakaṃ brahma vyācaṣṭe tena brahma bhavanti hi /" KKh 5.25-27b. Other passages are even more explicit in stressing the dichotomy between the redemptive powers of the holy field and yogic discipline. Thus: "The high state which is easily obtained in Kāśī by rabbits and flies is not acquired anywhere else even by yogis endowed with spiritual accomplishments." KKh 3.78. See also KKh 32.136 and passim.

[91]   It must be noted that JU identifies Avimukta as the ātman to be meditated upon in the juncture between the eyebrows and the nose, conceiving 'varaṇā' and 'nāsī' not as rivers (nadī) but as breathing conducts (probably the nāḍīs) whereby sins (pāpān) and impurities (doṣān) are extinguished through yoga: "So 'vimukta upāsyo ya eṣo 'nanto 'vyakta ātmā so 'vimukte pratṣṭhita iti / so 'vimuktaḥ kasmin pratṣṭhita iti varaṇāyāṃ nāsyāṃ ca madhye pratṣṭhita iti / kā vai varaṇā

The latter portion of the above quote conveys our attention to the enigma of the *tāraka* mantra which we shall discuss in the following chapter.

The silent clash between the Rāmaite and Śaivite traditions in the KKh: Tāraka and Kāśī mantras

The KKh emphasises the power of mantras in a way that is rather striking for a work of the *sthāla-māhātmya* genre. Some mantras are described as effective in redemptive power as the holy place they name. *Mokṣa* is attained by invoking the name of the town (the two syllable Kāśī mantra described in KKh 64.31-39) at one's hour of death, apparently waiving the need for dying in the holy ground in order to be released from *saṃsāra*.[92] This seems to contradict one of the major points the KKh is aiming at, which is to stress that dying in the holy city is a *sine*

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kā nāsīti sarvān indriyakṛtān doṣān vārayatīti tena varaṇā bhavati sarvān indriyakṛtān pāpān nāśayatīti tena nāsī bhavatīti //katamañ cāsya sthānaṃ bhavatīti / bhruvor praṇasya ca yaḥ saṃdhiḥ sa eṣa dyaurlokasya parasya ca saṃdhirbhavatīti // etad vai saṃdhiṃ saṃdhyāṃ brahmavida upāsate iti so 'viṃkta upāsya iti / so 'vimuktaṃ jñānam ācaṣṭe yo vai tad etad evaṃ vedeti //" JU 2. Furthermore, it is in Avimukta, conceived as the yogī's *ātman*, that Śiva is said to impart the *tāraka mantram*: "*atra hi jantoḥ prāṇeṣūtkramamāṇeṣu rudras tārakaṃ brahma vyācaṣṭe yenāsāv amṛtī bhūtvā mokṣī bhavati tasmād avimuktam eva niṣeveta avimuktaṃ na vimuñced evam evaitad yājñavalkyaḥ*" JU 1. In this manner, JU represents a yogic strand that is clearly antagonistic to the religion of the *māhātmyas* as it implicitly argues against those who ascribe holiness to external places, internalizing the latter (here Vārāṇasī) into the yogic body. Aware of this criticism, KKh 5.25-27b not only reinterprets but reformulates this passage of JU projecting the inner yogic space again into the outer world, to retrieve the holy sites hijacked by the ascetics and reassure pilgrims of their need to journey to the city to attain *mokṣa*. JU's concept of Avimukta as the *ātman* never to be forsaken is completely reinterpreted in KKh 5.24-30, where Avimukta is praised as the holy field that grants liberation through Śiva's *tāraka mantra*, only a fool could think of abandoning (see KKh 5.12-20 and 30). The fact that the JU appears to be responding to an earlier tradition that sanctifies Avimukta/Vārāṇasī as a holy field points to a relative chronology the sequence of which places the JU after the VMSP/SP. This is also suggested by Bakker, while discussing JU's spiritual concept of Avimukta: "It remains as yet uncertain whether this conception, devoid of any geographical correspondence, came first and became reified eventually, when the holy *kṣetra* became defined as being situated between two rivers, the Varaṇā and Asi, or whether the allegorical interpretation of the *Jābāla Upaniṣad* reflected an historic reality. The latter possibility appears more probable. This would entail a considerably later date, by at least 900 years, for the *Jābāla Upaniṣad* than the 300 BC that has been proposed by Sprockhoff. Such a later date seems also suggested by the passage concerning the 'saving mantra' (*tārakaṃ brahma*), a semi-metrical periscope that this Upaniṣad has in common with the RA recension of the original *Skandapurāṇa*." Bakker 2006, 32. For this "semi-metrical periscope" compare JU 1 and KKh.5.26cd-27ab (both quoted above) with SPra according to Bhatarai's edition (30.52cd-53ab): *atrokramaṇakāle tu svayam eva maheśvaraḥ / dadāti tārakaṃ brahma yenāsau tanmayo bhavet.* As quoted in Bakker 2006, 29 and 35 note 19. See also SPIIA 51-52.

[92]   KKh 64.38: *kāśikāśītikāśīti japato yasya saṃsthitiḥ / anyatrāpi satas tasya puromuktiḥ prakaśate //* Note the emphasis on *anyatrāpi*.

qua non.[93] But a basic premise of mantra philosophy conceives the holy name to be identical with the named reality. Conceiving Kāśī as a mantra means the entire city is *de facto* contained within two syllables, a mythic world that automatically unfolds once its name is invoked with faith. He who dies out of Kāśī but is still able to articulate its name on his deathbed makes the city immediately present and is saved. In this manner, the simple doctrine of the Kāśī mantra continues to envisage the city as a *sine qua non* for salvation. This is an odd doctrine in any case for it exempts the seeker of liberation from making a journey to the holy city, and I am not aware of other *māhātmyas* expressing a similar belief. More than an outrageous thought in the mind of some chauvinistic Vārāṇasī Brahmin, this belief is serious enough to be considered in the light of the historical circumstances in which it was first imagined.

The doctrine of the Kāśī-mantra surfaces for the first time in the KKh and is perhaps the most important mantra in this text. Reciting the name of the holy city is extolled as the highest form of worship being even more effective than the worship of Śiva.[94] In this sense, the exaggerated praise of the Kāśī-mantra is consistent with the overall religious ideology of the KKh where the city is holier than its presiding God, as the retelling of the Divodāsa legend so aptly illustrates by making Kāśī the object of Śiva's *viraha* during his exile in the Mandara mountain.

I suspect the Kāśī-mantra was introduced by the KKh to reinforce the city's holiness against other forms of worship that relied exclusively on mantra philosophy and were mainly related to the emerging Rāmaite cult. In fact a major issue over which the Śaivite and Rāmaite traditions were sure to rival was the content of the celebrated *tāraka-mantra* that Śiva supposedly utters into the right ear of the moribund at the releasing ghat of Maṇikarṇika, the major cremation ground of the city. How this holy spot came to arise is explained in KKh as a result of Viṣṇu's penance which moves Śiva in such a way that:

> "On seeing the steady increase of this penance of yours, I [Śiva] shook my head having serpents. As a result of that movement, my gemset earring fell down. It was set with jewels and was beautiful in appearance. Let this (sacred expanse of water) be named Maṇikarṇikā. This splendid sacred place had become well known as Cakrapuṣkariṇī Tīrtha formerly, because it was dug out by means of your [Viṣṇu's] discus, O Lord holding the conch, discus and mace. Let it become famous by the name Maṇikarṇikā here in this world, ever since the time when the gemset earring fell into it from my ear." (in Tagare's translation) [95]

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[93]   The long narrative of Śivaśarman (KKh 7-24) devotes several chapters to make this point unmistakably clear.

[94]   See KKh 64. 41-54; especially KKh 85.61-66. Thus for example KKh 85.64: *mune na me priyas tadvad dikṣito mama pūjakaḥ / yādṛk priyataraḥ satyaṃ kāśīstavanalāla saḥ //.*

[95]   *"tvadīyasyāsya   tapaso   mahopacayadarśanāt   /   yan   mayāndolito mailirahiśravaṇabhūṣaṇaḥ // tadāndolataḥ karṇāt papāta maṇikarṇikā / maṇibhiḥ khacitā ramyā tato 'stu maṇikarṇikā // cakrapuṣkariṇītīrthaṃ purākhyātam idaṃ śubham / tvayā cakreṇa khananāc chaṅkhacakragadādhara // mama karṇāt papāteyaṃ yadā ca maṇikarṇikā / tadā prabhṛti loke 'tra khyātā 'stu ma maṇikarṇikā //'* KKh 26.62-65.

The above passage thus imposes a new name for a site that appears to have been earlier connected with Vaiṣṇavism. However, the KKh states that the source of Maṇikarṇikā's sacredness is not the fact that it was dug up by Viṣṇu's holy *cakra* but the fact that it has been blessed to become the worthy receptacle of Śiva's golden earring. The KKh further explains the etymology of this site in the following way:

> "The auspicious Lord Śiva, the wish-yielding Cintāmaṇi jewel unto the men of worldly pursuits, whispers the Tāraka Mantra into the (right) ear [*karṇikāyām*] of good people at the time of death. Hence this holy spot is spoken of as Maṇikarṇikā." (in Tagare's translation) [96]

Stressing in a different chapter that:

> "The greatest worshippers of Viṣṇu have always performed *japa* of the auspicious Maṇikarṇikā [even] in Vaikuṇṭha, Viṣṇu's abode, for the sake of liberation."[97]

The Śaivite author(s) of the KKh is here aiming at subordinating an earlier, perhaps contemporary, stratum of Vaiṣṇavism to his own sectarian claims. The symbolism of Śiva's earring, on the other hand, is obviously associated with the redeeming power of the *tāraka-brahman* or *karṇa-jāpa*, referring to a soteriology based on a holy sound the formulaic content of which is never clearly disclosed. The above verse, however, seems to suggest this is the *jāpa* of Maṇikarṇikā, and in KKh 61.97 the Maṇikarṇikā mantra is further specified as the *praṇava* (*oṃ*) when it is said to consist of the fourteen syllables: *om maṃ maṇikarṇike praṇavātmike namaḥ*. This powerful utterance grants *mukti* even out of this holy place if repeated three hundred thousand times,[98] a feasible amount for a pious Hindu although pilgrimage would seem a comparatively easier choice. And a safer one since at no instance does our text reveals that this is the mantra Śiva whispers into the human ear, even if it seems to insinuate '*oṃ*'.

Another important passage dealing with this issue occurs when the KKh narrates the origin of the Omkāreśvara temple.[99] The KKh claims that after

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[96]   "*saṃsāricintāmaṇir atra yasmāt taṃ tārakaṃ sajjanakarṇikāyām / śivo 'bhidhatte sahasā 'ntakāle tad gīyate 'sau maṇikarṇiketi //*" KKh 7.79.

[97]   "*vaikuṇṭhe viṣṇubhavane viṣṇubhaktiparāyaṇāḥ / japeyuḥ satataṃ muktyai śrīmatīṃ maṇikarṇikām*" KKh 34.4.

[98]   KKh 61.100: *trilakṣamantrajapyena mṛto deśāṃtareśv api/ avaśyaṃ muktim āpnoti mantrasyāsya prabhāvataḥ //*

[99]   Omkāreśvara seems to have been a grand temple complex sheltering "five separate shrines, one for each part of this mystical sound." Eck 1983, 114. The Omkāreśvara temple lapsed after the Islamic conquest, being reduced today to a very discrete site in a predominantly Muslim neighbourhood of Vārāṇasī. Eck suspects "Omkāreśvara itself probably stood on the adjacent larger hillock now occupied by the shrine of a Muslim saint and covered with Muslim graves." *ibid.* Omkāreśvara is also considered one of the fourteen liṅgams the KKh refers to in 86.108-110

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Brahmā performed penance there for a thousand yugas he underwent a major synaesthetic experience. A splendid shaft of light (*jyotis*) manifested in front of him and gradually revealed itself as the *praṇava*, the sound embodiment of Brahman (*śabdabrahman*), materializing in the form of the Omkāreśvara liṅgam. *Praṇava* or the single-syllable *oṃ*, the text continues, is known as Tāra because it liberates (*tārayet*) whoever pronounces, or meditates on, it. The text, however, is not explicit as to whether this Tāra-mantra is the same as the Tāraka-mantra muttered by Śiva at Maṇikarṇika,[100] and as a consequence the 'Rāmānandī' commentator of KKh is able to gloss Śiva's Tāraka-mantra as "either *praṇava* or Rāma's *ṣaḍakṣara mantra*".[101] This is rather striking because, even though the KKh mythology of Maṇikarṇika is partially associated with Viṣṇu, our text never mentions Rāma.

To address the issue we left inconclusive at the end of the previous chapter, we may return to that passage in KKh were Jābāli's esoteric vision of Vārāṇasī is discussed. In this context, at verses 5.27c-28, the doctrine of the *tāraka mantra* is ascribed to the Veda. It is significant that at this point of his commentary our pundit discloses the source he is following for associating the *tāraka mantra* with Rāma, identifying the aforesaid Veda with the *Atharva*: "*tathā cātharvaṇaśrutau viśveśvaraṃ prati – atha sa hovāca śrīrāmaḥ*". The verses quoted below are provided by our commentator as coming from this authoritative source. They seem to belong to the *Rāmottaratāpanīya Upaniṣad*, which reputedly belongs to the *Atharva Veda*, but in fact is largely based on the *Agastyasaṃhitā* (AgS):[102]

> *kṣetre 'tra tava deveśa yatra kutrāpi vā mṛtāḥ /*
> *kṛmikīṭādayo 'py āśu muktāḥ santu na cānyathā //* (AgS 7.26a-d)

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and 73.32-36. KKh 73 was probably written after the collapse of the temple's glory. A somewhat long introduction listing a series of liṅgams precedes the mythical account of the Omkāreśvara site, warning the reader that many of these remain concealed during the Kali-yuga except for those who can perceive them through devotion (KKh 73.43-45), the mere utterance of their holy names being effective enough to destroy all sins and increase merits (KKh 73.31). Had these liṅgams disappeared by the time the author was writing these words? The text seems here to be alluding to temple destructions: "Some [liṅgams] are visible, some are invisible. O dear one, some of them have become ruined; some are shattered due to passage of time. O fair lady, they are also to be worshipped. [...] In Kali age, O Daughter of the Lord of the Mountains, they will become totally concealed but their power will never disappear from their respective spots. Those who are full of the sins of Kali age, those who are wicked, heretics and rogues, will never know even the names of these Siddha Liṅgas." KKh 73.24c-25a-b and 29-30.

[100] KKh 73.90ef reads "tāra iti akhyāto" and not tāraka as in Tagare's translation, which may (mis)lead us to identify Om with the tāraka brahma uttered by Śiva at Maṇikarṇika Tīrtha as in KKh 61.118. " *tatpare tārakaṃ tīrthaṃ yatra viśveśvaraḥ svayam / ācaṣṭe tārakaṃ brahma mṛtakarṇe mṛtātmakam //*".

[101] "*tārakasya praṇavasya śrīrāmaṣaḍakṣaramantrarājasya vā*". Commenting on KKh 5.28, 2.105, 7.79, 25.73, and *passim*.

[102] I have introduced some parenthesis at the end of the verses to show the parallels, or lack of them (-), with the Barkhuis' (1995) critical edition of the AgS.

"Lord of gods, those who perish at any spot in this holy field of yours, they shall soon be liberated without a doubt, even if they are to be worms, insects, etc."

avimukte tava kṣetre sarveṣāṃ muktisiddhaye / (-)
ahaṃ sannihitas tatra pāṣāṇapratimādiṣu // (AgS 7.28a-b)

"In Avimukta, your holy field, I reside in stones, deities, etc, for the sake of everybody's final release."

kṣetre 'smin yo 'rcayed bhaktyā mantreṇanena māṃ śiva / (-)
brahmahatyādipāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā sucaḥ // (-)

"I shall liberate from sins such as Brahmin-slaughter and so on, he who fervently worships me through this mantra in this holy field, O Śiva!"

tvatto vā brahmaṇo vā 'pi labhante ṣaḍakṣaram /
jīvanto mantrasiddhāḥ syur muktā māṃ prāpnuvanti te // (AgS 7.27a-d,)

"Those who obtain the *ṣaḍakṣaram* either from you or even from Brahmā, they become perfected in the mantra within their lifetime and reach me [upon their death] being [already] liberated (*muktā*)."[103]

mumūrṣordakṣiṇe karṇe yasya kasyā 'pi vā svayam /
upadekṣasi manmantraṃ sa mukto bhavati śiva // (AgS 7.29a-d)

"You yourself shall impart my mantra into the right ear of whomever seeks to be liberated, or even to anybody; he will [thereby] be released, O Śiva."[104]

A similar strategy to the one used by the KKh's mythology of Maṇikarṇika is adopted here by our commentator echoing AgS 7, to subordinate the redeeming powers of Śiva's holy ground to the efficacy of Rāma's mantra and pervasive presence in the city. Moreover, it is stressed that devotees can already be liberated during their lifetime if only they have been imparted Rāma's *ṣaḍakṣara*, death at Vārāṇasī and Śiva's blessing being a mere expediency on the route to heaven.

The date of this commentary is uncertain, but the fact that it provides a twofold alternative to gloss the *tāraka mantra* of which one (the Rāmaite) is never even hinted at in the KKh seems significant. For this is also suggested in a page of the *Tristhālisetu* (mid 16th century), when Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa quotes from KKh to explain Śiva's *tāraka mantra* as *praṇava*, while referring to the *Rāmatāpaniya Upaniṣad* and the *Padma Purāṇa* as sources that testify in favour of Rāma's *ṣaḍakṣara*.[105] The *Rāmānandī vyākhyayā* that provides the commentary of KKh may date from this period (16th-17th century), a time when both solutions for the

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[103]   Barkhuis' criticial edition reads '*mṛtā*' and ascribes the variant '*muktā*' to a Y manuscript. See Barkhuis 1995, Part 2, 38. "*Muktā*" however makes perfect sense with the sentence.

[104]   Barkhuis reads '*mumukṣor*' instead of the misspelled '*mumūrṣor*', the latter figuring in the aforementioned Y manuscript. See *ibid*. I follow Barkhuis' emendation in my translation.

[105]   See TS, p. 291.

enigma of the *tāraka mantra* were being harmonized in the religious literature of Vārāṇasī, and during which Tulsīdās composed his *Rāmacaritamānasa*. In any case, the religious debate surrounding the *tāraka-mantra* is certainly much earlier than this and had been already ignited by the time the KKh was composed. We should therefore proceed from the branches down into the roots of Rāmaite devotion in Vārāṇasī.

The core doctrine of the AgS, a text written in 11th century Vārāṇasī, is the theory of sound surrounding the divinity of Rāma's holy name. The AgS in fact emphasizes Rāma *kīrtana, japa* and *saguṇa* worship as the highest *sādhana*, and in this text the doctrine of the Rāma mantra acquires unprecedented relevance for Vārāṇasī. AgS (7.14-21) claims that it was at the Lolārka ghat where Brahmā mercifully imparted Rāma's *ṣaḍakṣara-mantra* to an impotent Śiva, so that he could effectively release his devotees from the nets of *saṃsāra* by whispering Rāma's name into their ears.[106] In these passages of AgS Rāma is synonymously addressed as Viṣṇu,[107] a significant epithet because, as we have seen, KKh only mentions Viṣṇu while narrating the mythology of Maṇikarṇikā, probably as a veiled allusion to some form of Rāma devotion connected with the holy site.

The Rāmaite mantra must have been already popular when the KKh was composed, and yet the Śaivite author(s) of the KKh does not unveil the content of the *tāraka-mantra* even while mentioning it time and again as granting liberation in Kāśī. Moreover, it is noteworthy that KKh omits any reference to contemporary trends of Rāmaite devotion throughout its hundred chapters.[108] From this one could infer the absence of a Rāmaite cult in Vārāṇasī at the time the KKh was produced, but such conjecture is likely to place our text in too early a period. For the Rāmaite cult was strongly patronized during the rule of the Gāhaḍāvala dynasty in the 12th century, a hundred or so years after the AgS was composed in the city. The Rāmaite cult must have been flourishing in Vārāṇasī when the KKh was composed, and its omission is most likely to express a deliberate way of shunning a rival sectarian claim as to the content of the *tāraka mantra*. In this sense, the attitude of the KKh towards the Rāmaite cult exemplifies a proverbial case of what a former Dutch member of the VOC would call "Oostindisch Doof". To counter the Rāmaite rendering of the *tāraka mantra*, the KKh endorsed a more convenient view whereby Śiva's blessing was no longer subordinated to the intercession of a different God. This is most probably why it insinuates that release is bestowed in Vārāṇasī when he utters the *praṇava* (instead of the *ṣaḍakṣara*).

I would argue that the doctrine of the Kāśī-mantra was introduced to fulfil a similar function, aiming to displace the Rāma-mantra from the centre of the Vārāṇasī soteriology. We have already seen how the Rāmaite tradition located Rām's name at the urban epicentre of salvation. This of course was untenable for

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[106]   See also H. T. Bakker 1986, 69-78.
[107]   See AgS 7.18a and 7.21d.
[108]   Only a very innocuous Rāmatīrtha is mentioned in a long catalogue of local Vaiṣṇava holy places in KKh 84.69.

the KKh, which promoted the Kāśī-mantra, a new *tāraka-mantra*, as it were, stripped of all Rāmaite connotations. Implicitly, the Kāśī-mantra doctrine claimed to supersede the *tāraka-mantra* by becoming effective even beyond the cremation ground of Maṇikarṇika, to highlight Kāśī as the ultimate granter of liberation instead of Rām.

However, the relations between Śaiva and Rāmaite devotees were not always hostile, especially in those ascetic movements such as the Nāth-yogīs and the later Rāmānandīs who cultivated a *nirguṇī* type of devotion where the names of Śiva and Rāma were somehow interchangeable.[109] The pioneering currents bolstering these and other ascetic groups were the backbone that supported the emergence of the major religious movement of the times: the Sants. The importance of this current in Indian religious history is certified by Bakker in the following terms:

> "The Sant movement might temporarily have taken the place of the repressed cult of the temple, as Hindu response to the challenge of Islām. [...] It would seem that the cult of the name as a separate strand in the religion of North India coincided roughly with the period of most stringent repression of temple worship and idolatry."[110]

It was during this time that the KKh was composed to embody a different type of response, reacting not only to Islam but also to the incipient Sant movement which threatened to erode even more the already wounded system of temple worship without which Hindu temple priests handled no power. In order to achieve this, the authors of the KKh had to oppose such contemporary trends as the Rāmaite devotees (*ṣaḍakṣara-mantra*) and the Nāth-yogīs (*ṣaḍaṅga-yoga*). I would contend that the Kāśī-mantra and the Kāśī-yoga were *ad hoc* responses the KKh respectively developed to counter each of these movements, after Islam had arrived in the city.

Conclusion

The previous chapters have shown that the KKh is a text that confronts a number of Hindu traditions (Rāmaite, Śākta and Nāth-yogic) which must have been influent in Vārāṇasī during the time of its composition. Some major strategies developed by the text have been demythologized to expose the historic context that inspired the creation of this new mythology. Large sections of this abundant narrative have not been dealt with in the present study which by no means claims thoroughness into the contents of the KKh. While many of these sections await further analysis, the partial conclusions reached so far as to the date (13th-14th century) and context (post-Islamic) of the KKh seem hard to refute.

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[109]   See H. T. Bakker 1986, 118 who refers to Vaudeville 1974, 140. For Śaiva elements and the importance of the *ṣaḍakṣara* Rām mantra in the Rāmānandī context see Burghart 1980.
[110]   H. T. Bakker, 1986, 121 and 123.

As we take leave of Vārāṇasī, I would like to end by returning to the Agastya-Vindhya episode discussed in a previous chapter:

> "Bidding farewell to all the residents there, the sages, children, the old ones and even the grasses, the trees and the creepers, that excellent ascetic circumambulated the city and left for good. [...] Better fare the grasses, trees and hedges in Kāśī who without straying elsewhere do not incur in sin. We are the foremost in the hierarchy of mobile beings, but pity on us who march today leaving Vārāṇasī behind. [...] Lamenting thus very much, that sage Agastya, having his wife (*abalā*?) by his side, suffered a great breakdown as that couple of krauñca birds [did before Vālmīki], prattling like one deprived of his lover: "Kāśī, O Kāśī, come back and give sight!" [111]

This dramatic passage captures Agastya's agony while leaving the holy city to which he will never return, but which he will recall from exile in the company of Skanda. The bulk of the KKh is their dialogue recounting the glories of distant Vārāṇasī. Why the narrators of KKh chose such a frame story and why was the Agastya figure selected to play a prominent place in the later mythology of Vārāṇasī?

The KKh tells us that before taking leave of the holy city the sage installed a *liṅgam* with his name and dug a *kuṇḍa* opposite to it (KKh 3.28). This site has been immortalized in the Agastīśa (KKh 61.177-179; 100.81) of the Agastyatīrtha (KKh 61.180; 83.106-112). The fact that the KKh mentions such sites shows that they were in existence when the text was composed.[112] Of course Agastya was not the only local ascetic figure to deserve a holy site in the city; other eminent ascetics such as Harikeśa and Jaigīṣāvya were already there before Agastya and today enjoy sites of their own within Agastya's neighbourhood. But the fact that Agastya's site is not mentioned in the earlier sources (VMSP) suggests that by the time of the KKh he was an emerging figure in Vārāṇasī.[113] That this holy figure

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[111]   "*āpṛcchaya sarvān samunīn munīśvaraḥ sabālavṛddhān api tatra vāsinaḥ / tṛṇāni vṛkṣāṃś ca latāḥ samastāḥ purīṃ parikramya ca niryayau ca // [...] varaṃ hi kāśyāṃ tṛṇavṛkṣagulmakāś caranti pāpaṃ na caranti nānyataḥ / vayaṃ carāṇāṃ prathamā dhigas tu no vārāṇasīṃ hādya vihāya gacchataḥ // [...] ittthaṃ vilapya bahuśaḥ sa munis tv agastyas tatkrauñcayugmavad aho abalāsahāyaḥ / mūrccham avāpa mahatīṃ virahīva jalpan hā kāśī kāśī punarehi ca dehi dṛṣṭim //*" KKh 5.45, 47, 50. The passing allusion to the krauñca birds in *śloka* 50 refers to the famous legendary incident that inspired the composition of Vālimiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* and the alleged origin of the *śloka* metre (see Vaudeville 1963). It is significant that the KKh conveys to this well known icon of Indian literature at the outset, before retelling the Vārāṇasī mythology. Both Vālmiki's verse and KKh's mythological reconstruction appear to be inspired by a dramatic event entailing the loss of a beloved companion.

[112]   Lakṣmīdhara's TVK (p. 116) identifies Agastya sites in the proximity of a Mukhaliṅgaṃ and to the west of Muṇḍeśa: "*agastyasya samīpe tu mukhaliṅgaṃ tu tiṣṭhati [...] agastyeśvarapūrveṇa muṇḍeśo nāma nāmataḥ.*" The sites of Agastya and Muṇḍeśa are also topographically related in KKh 97.243-246, but it is difficult to say whether the position of these sites is the same as in TVK.

[113]   In the third *khaṇḍa* of Lakṣmīdhara's *Kṛtyakalpataru* "offering respect to Agastya" is one of the pious actions recommended. See Kane I, 664.

was respected, if not worshipped, by more than one local religious group seems very plausible if we consider that three different sources (dating from a similar period and probably composed in Vārāṇasī) contend Agastya's religious affiliation to bring him into their own fold. Hence Agastya worships Rāma in the AgS, Devī in the DBP, and Śiva in the KKh.

The figure of Agastya representing the model of the lay Vedic *ṛṣi*[114] yielded itself smoothly to the religious priorities of the KKh, which endorsed dharma and the householder stage of life as superior to renunciation.[115] This lay form of asceticism was more receptive to *bhakti* influences than the strands of monastic asceticism which are often condescending towards holy places. For all the ascetic achievements of Agastya, as a Śiva-worshipper he could not abandon the holy city behaving like a detached sage. In this manner, the Agastya-Vindhya narrative was used as the frame story of the KKh to introduce the theme of *viraha bhakti* in connection with the holy city, probably after the temples of Varanasi had been desecrated by the Islamic conquest. In this sense, the paradigmatic situation of Agastya longing for the vanishing temples replicates the situation of the 13-14th century Hindu, who longs for the missing splendour of the city shrines deprived by iconoclasm, and aims to reconstruct them through the renewing power of a rehabilitated Vārāṇasī mythology.

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[114]   See Bronkhorst 1998, 52.
[115]   See KKh 10.47-62 and 11.32-37.

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